



Bermuda

**By Chris Addams and Michael Davis**  
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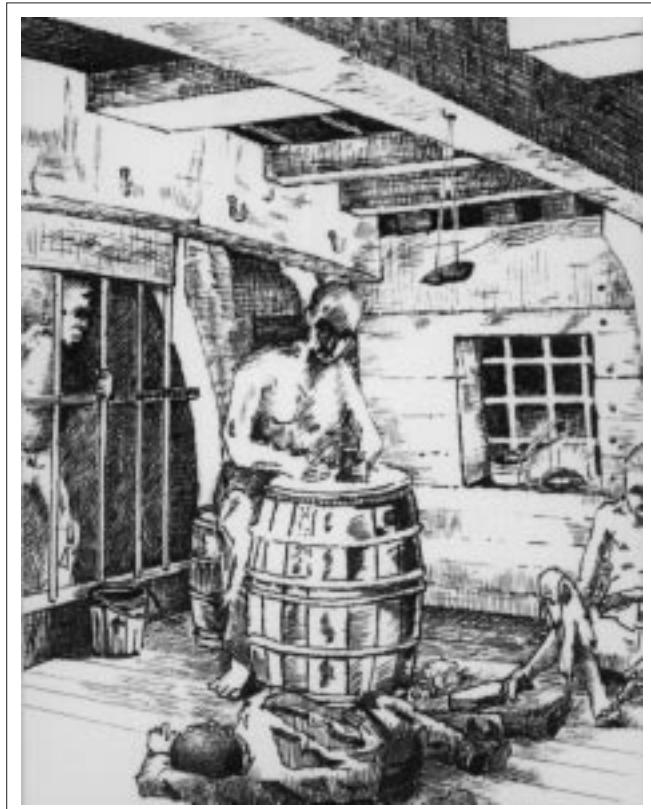
Tasmania and Devil's Island have come to grips with their horror stories of convict prisons (Devil's Island being the basis of the book and film "Papillion"). In Bermuda, one of the mass grave sites of the convicts, is now unwittingly a trash burning site and the bones of the felons and convicts stick out of the sparse top soil, in unconsecrated ground. This is reminiscent of the unique graveyard of the black slaves found in lower Manhattan, N.Y. or the convicts held at Wallabout Bay (Brooklyn Navy Yard) New York City.

On these havens of incredible inhumanity at Wallabout Bay, more patriots died than they did fighting the British in open battle. Prisoners upon these hulks were expendable. Convicts were to be used as a resource to strengthen defences and aid powerful countries to grow. Britain and Bermuda benefited by utilizing slave labor both white and black.

These prisoners included not only convicts, but reformists, unionists and general insurrectionists who were fed up with the Status Quo. In essence, a solid background for the people who had their own way of seeing and doing things (very stubborn, very opinionated and ready for a fight at any time, just to name a few of their qualities.) The Confederate Southern States people loosely termed "red-necks" are from this base, very little other than their accents divides them from basic Australian stock.



*For some torture was commonplace*



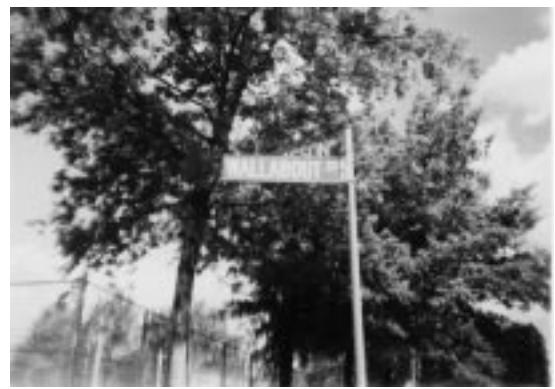
*Engraving of life on a convict hulk*

**T**hough many books have been written on the subject of immigration to the Americas, very little was written on the folk who arrived in chains.

The British in essence changed the course of history by providing vast human resources, whether willing or unwilling, to expand empires. They helped beat some of the best armies and navies of the period.

Though Britains' vast empires are gone, as her monopoly on trade and traffic are no more, her "new" territories are by and large populated by felons from her bulging jail system and her very profitable trade in slaves (read Transatlantic Slavery by Anthony Tibble). As it so happens, convicts and slaves are two subjects that are quietly neglected in conversation in some countries. National Museums and Galleries of the Merseyside in Liverpool, England and Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia have attempted to bridge this almost taboo subject.

Wallabout Bay, New York, U.S.A. has had floating dungeons (rotting prison hulks) since before 1776. Names that come to mind are the Whitby, Jersey and Scorpion. The United States federal government recognizes that Wallabout Bay (Brooklyn Navy yard) has thousands upon thousands of patriots graves. The federal government has gone so far as to research and suggest that graves will be unearthed whenever any digging takes place in Brooklyn Navy yard, New York.



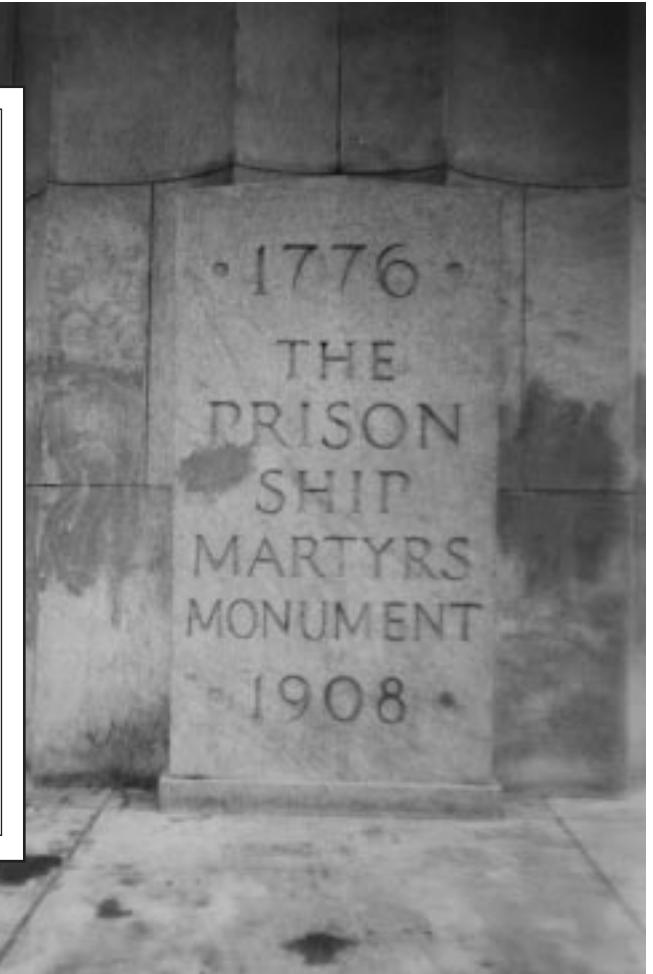
*Map of Wallabout Bay area N.Y. USA*

*Aerial view of Bermuda*



**A**lthough information has been difficult to find concerning the patriots in Wallabout Bay, Fort Green, and Brooklyn areas, a monument has been erected to acknowledge their existence and realize their sacrifices and contributions to society by creating a better world. This period was from 1700-1800's. These areas have been built upon and it is known by the United States federal government where sites exist that patriots are buried. As of this date, no excavating has been initiated to research the remains of well over 12,000 victims.

A unique graveyard of black slaves was recently found in lower Manhattan, New York the same type of beads and fists are found on the convict sites in Bermuda. However, in Bermuda the graves are known, but not discussed.



**C**oncerning the convicts in Bermuda, a remarkable "time capsule" of the dreaded convict hulks has been found, excavated and a hitherto totally unknown collection of convict art has been discovered. Refer to RG magazine June 1995, Deep Secrets by Chris Addams. The collection of convict art was basically made by prisoners from the very cave limestone they excavated to build the west end of the island, known as Dock Yard.

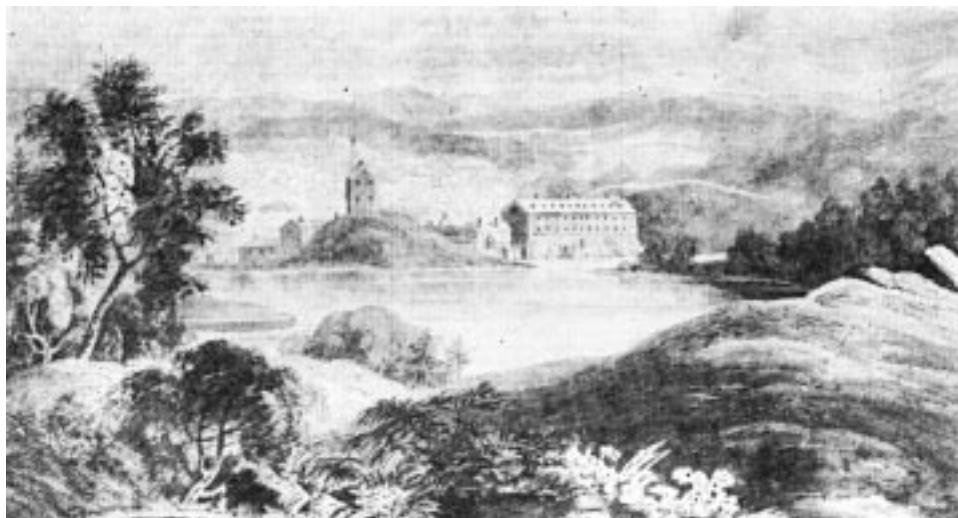
The Collection as a whole has now been evaluated by leading experts on unique art for Sotheby's, Christies and Phillips.



However, the very thought that convicts by the thousands worked and died in Bermuda is still very repugnant to the image it wishes to portray to the world.



*Aerial view of Dockyard, Bermuda*



*Melville Island prison from the northeast. J.E. Woolford, Sketches in Nova Scotia, 1817*



*Drawing of scene by a convict hulk*

The "Convict Hulk" site (which can be seen on the internet <http://www.inad.com/bermuda>) gives a stunning insight to an age where many Australians and Red-Necks are from common stock. The video and Audio are done with the kind permission of Brendan Hollis of Bermudas' own "Trinton Enterprises". His two episodes on Dockyard, Bermuda and convicts are available on two cassettes. Brendan can also supply fascinating video representation of Bermudas' involvement with the Civil War in the United States. Artifacts from the "Civil War" have also been found in Bermuda.

A certain well educated Irish reformist named John Mitchell thought he would denounce the English oppression in the 1840's and everyone else would rise up and throw off the English yoke! Not to be, one of the infamous "rigged courts" threw him in Corks Harbors notorious Spike Island. Soon after he found himself as convict #2014 aboard the dreaded hulk *Dromedary* in lovely Bermuda. Although the *Dromedary* was once a proud service vessel of New Zealand, it was now a vermin ridden, rat infested, packed to the brim with convicts, prison hulk. This hulk was controlled by the worst guards in a dimly lit world of "anything goes".

John Mitchell published a book after his return from deportation called the Jail Journal. Mitchell states, "The British Transportation service is the worst scheme to be contrived and I seriously think it was by the Devil and some of his friends." He goes on to recount how the clank of prisoners chains was seldom out of his ears as the " moonblind " convicts stumbled back from Bermudas' notorious quarries, this followed vicious flogging by the dreaded " cat-o-nine tails ". The screams of the poor manacled wretches will stay with me forever. Mitchells cell was a six foot claustrophobic square which was covered with "huge" brown beetles (cockroaches).

One of the more famous Governors of Bermuda from 1846-1852 was Charles Elliot, R.N. . He was later to be Britains man in Texas after the Alamo and also responsible for Hong

Kong becoming a British commonwealth.

Another champion of the convict era who was sentenced to Bermuda for a misdemeanor was Baxter Grundy, a lawyer from Manchester England. Upon the survival of his sentence aboard the most dreaded hulk of all times the "Thames", he brought a list of accusations against the British government system under Lord Grey (of tea fame) all based on truth.

The consequence of which is that the convict hulk system was totally banned from the face of the earth. The very last place it survived was not Australia but Bermuda.

What is the Australian connection? If the convicts did not die in Bermuda from their work in the quarries, or the dreaded Yellow Fever, then it was death aboard the "dreaded hulks". The convicts that did survive their sentences on the isle known for its blue waters, virgin sands, citrus orchards and of course the Bermuda Onion ( not to be forgotten) were shipped Down Under. The fair shores of old England had it's hands full with convicts and did not want a shipload of " Bill Sikes " from the sunny Bermuda shores.

A Canadian connection also exists. As early as 1780, French prisoners were house on Kavanaugh Island, later know as Melville Island (1804) which was located on the south side of the North West arm in Halifax.

During the War of 1812, Melville Island housed American prisoners as well as French.

Excerpts from the diary of a Frenchman, Francois Lambert Bourneuf, who spent three years on Melville Island, indicate that prisoners crafted various items from available resources. Name seals for letters, knives, dice and dominoes were made from bone which the prisoners bought from butchers in Halifax. War prisoners appear to have been treated more lenient than the local people who were incarcerated. The war prisoners bought supplies through the jailer and in turn sold and traded their crafts. Many of their carvings show a common resource of ideas with the convicts of Bermuda.

Bermuda is an island of great beauty and serenity, but underwater artifacts from the days of the convicts have been found. These were the years of hard labor and atrocious living conditions. The prisoners were working long days and when time was theirs, they crafted carvings to keep or sell. The natural raw materials found and used were only limited by a creators resourcefulness and imagination. Carvings could be crude or works of art, depending on the individuals talents.

The Yellow Fever epidemic caused countless deaths and many feared the unknown cause. The dead individuals worldly possessions were burnt on the beaches. This practice held true for all people who died of Yellow Fever on the beautiful but sometimes trying island.

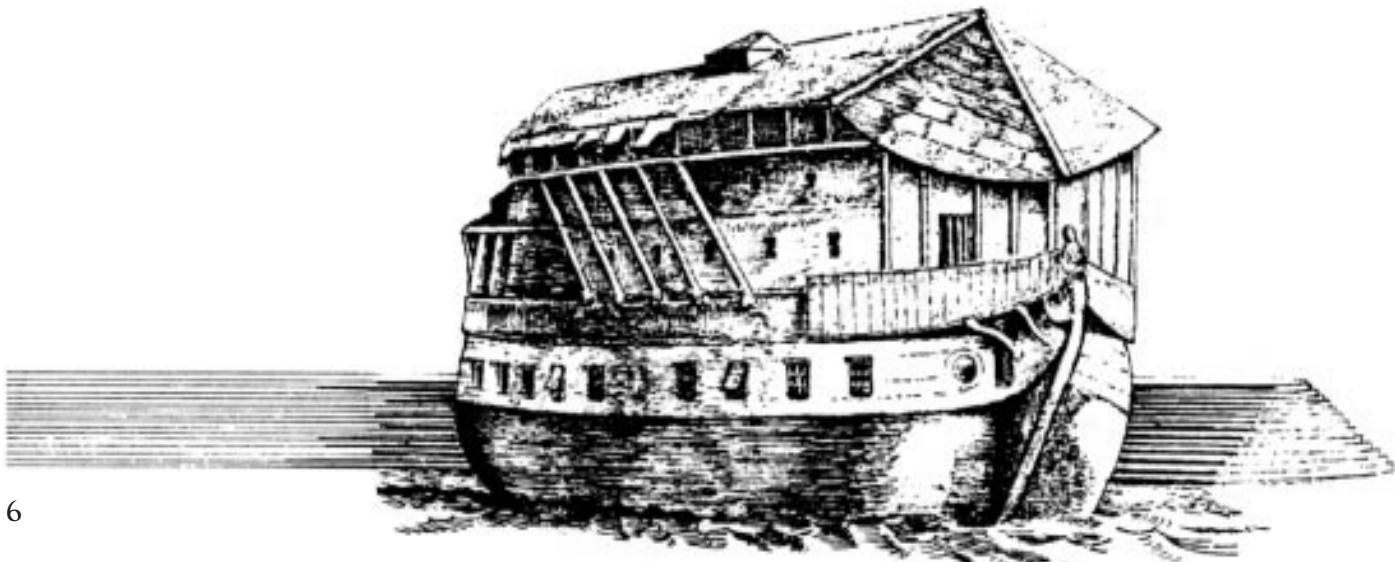
The prisoners living in cramped areas under adverse conditions, were susceptible to disease and injury, both physical and mental.

Their belongings are the artifacts of today, they tell a story of life long ago on a much less forgiving island. People worked hard to survive each day.



*Examples of clenched fist convict carvings*

*Engraving of a "Convict Hulk" prison ship*



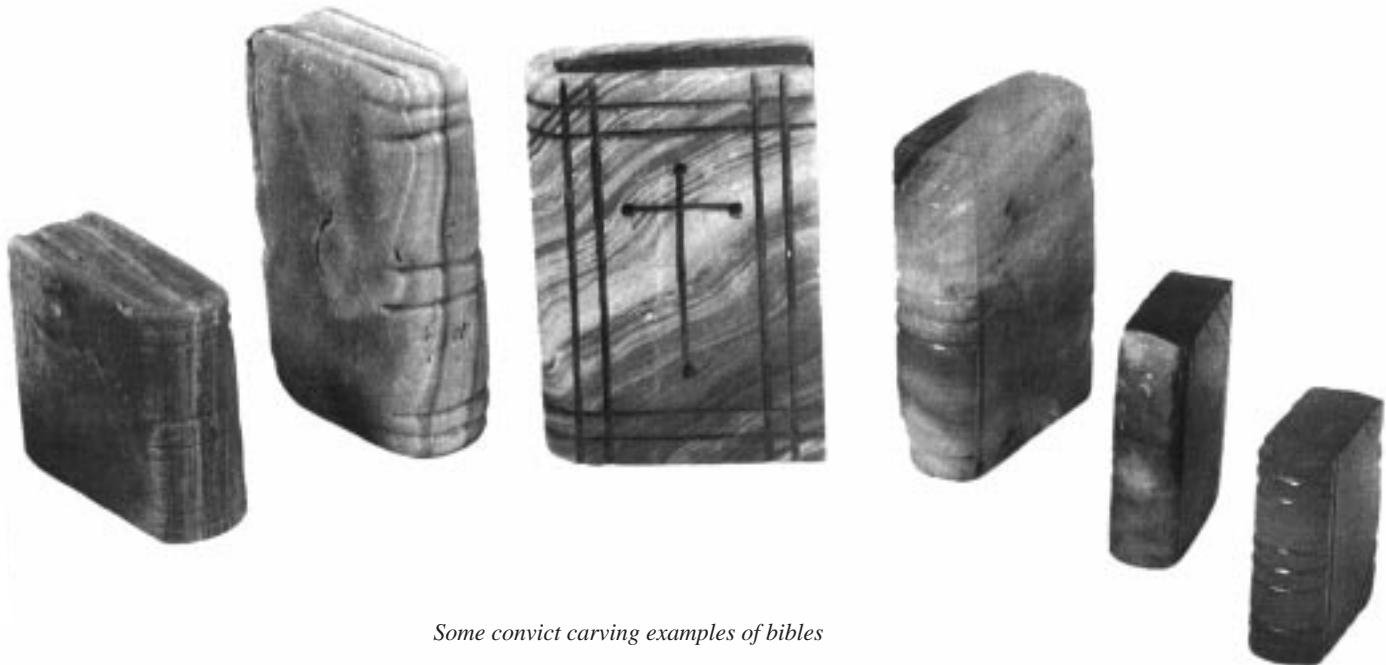
**A**fter much research, areas where some of these creative prisoner relics have been located, revealing that the prisoner ship "Dromedary" was docked at the Bermuda Dockyard since 1826. Prisoners lived and died on this "convict hulk" daily. It is in this area that the most rewarding dives have been undertaken.

This Dockyard dive site was a time capsule encased in fine packed coal dust.

The Confederate South found in South Wales a coal that was almost sulphurless, so it was mined and used aboard blockade runners. This coal provided a higher combustion to speed ratio and the residue emanating from the stack was colorless, especially to the union blockade. The union blockade used Cumberland coal, very heavy in sulphur and very obvious over the horizon. What does this all have to do with the convicts? Well the post convict era trash was sealed with good old coal slag and lumps of coal, pressed and stamped South Wales.

Years of life have been preserved under the water. The discarded belongings have now become "story tellers". These "story tellers" were not easy to find. The unearthing of the relics was labor intensive and dangerous.

This prison hulk the "Dromedary" has been our government registered dive site for seventeen years. It was the first site ever completed on a convict ship and is recognized internationally as such, a virtual time capsule of convict life.



*Some convict carving examples of bibles*

**T**he site we dive has produced prison guard buttons from Newgate, Millbank and other 19th century London prisons. These prisons have all been described in literature by Charles Dickens. These prison guard buttons came from the very brutal guards sent to Bermuda to watch over the convicts. They all take their place in Bermuda's history.



*Some scenes of old convict hulks*

**W**e have found a very rare button from the Thames River Police, the very beginning of John Peels' prison force when it worked hand in fist with the notorious " Bow Street Runners". The curator of Scotland Yards Police " Black Museum" was contacted and he authenticated this very rare button. This led us into researching the world of the nightmare confrontations between what happened on the Thames of old, the Police Rowing Gallery and the highly organized criminal world.





*Hand carved holy water vial*

*Pipes exported from England and a  
Pipe tamper made from beautiful cave material*

Onto convict possessions and carvings. After several seasons of diving on Dockyard all we had to show for our time was that we had progressed through three feet of accumulated Dockyard trash and now hit hard bottom. After three winters of diving we now located a weak point in the hard bottom crust of "compacted coal dust". Once through the crust we found ourselves knee deep in a dense graveyard of horse and salt beef bones. Flesh still clung to some bones, 150 years later. Our first convict carving ... a ten inch high, coral stone deck chess piece. We were soon finding other remarkable objects fabricated out of multicolored cave lime stone, as well as coral, bone and slate.

*Convict Carvings: Beaded necklaces, crosses and fists using natural materials from caves.*

"Fist"  
A supernatural token to ward off evil eye. Its beginnings date back to the Sumerians.

*Catholic*

*Protestant*



**I**t's hard to believe the delicate tiny pieces could be made in atrocious circumstances by the convicts under the dim light of smelly pig fat lamps, using rudimentary tools of sandstone and slate. These men shaped hard limestone chunks into rosary beads, jewelry, bone utensils, exquisite pipe tamps, stamps for sealing wax, paperweights, cannons with their trucks and even the little wheels are carved from limestone. Our favorite piece by far is the clenched fist, usually worn around the neck of God-fearing sailors to ward off the "Evil Eye". Different forms of this clenched-fist carving have been found on wrecks, especially of Spanish origin, such as Mel Fisher's "Atochia". On rare occasions, first carvings made by Napoleonic prisoners turn up at auction.

Beyond the artifacts' intrinsic beauty lies their historic value. They are the first carvings ever to be found at a convict hulk site and give a fresh picture of this dreadful time in Bermuda's history.

It is doubtful that more than a handful of the convicts had any idea of the true value of their creations. They all knew, however, that for them these pieces represented a kind of currency.



Although strictly banned by Governor, Sir Charles Elliot, a flourishing trade existed, not only between the convicts and local citizens, but also between the convicts and their own thuggish guards.

"Huckstering" shops thrived in the dingiest corners of the hulks, well away from the prying eyes of officials. Tiny beautiful carvings were exchanged for fresh fruit, vegetables, tobacco and the illicit local rum. The Government paid the convicts threepence each per day, twopence of which was withheld for "bed and board". The remaining penny went into a "fund", and on termination of their years of hardship and deprivation, the convicts were given their pittance and shipped back to England.

Or so the convicts thought. They were misfits, at least half of them blind or maimed.

Their carvings, finally discovered and "rescued" from an ocean grave, are a stunning reminder of what the human spirit can endure.



*Convict carved Bermuda Limestone*



*Convict hypodermic needle for syphilis*



*Hand carved convict hair and tooth brushes*



*Various bottles and convict material*

**R**eference books and videos includes:

1. Complexity by Mitchell Waldrop
2. An inquiry into the caves of the Wealth of Nations  
by Adam Smith 1723-1790
3. Transatlantic Slavery by Anthony Tibble
4. Bermuda Dockyard + convicts video by Trinton Enterprises  
( Brendan Hollis)
5. RG magazine June 1995 - Deep Secrets by Chris Addams and Michael Davis
6. Offshore magazine April 1995 - In The Depths of Hell  
Wallabout Bay, N.Y.
7. Bermuda Festival magazine 1990 - Convict Carvings by Chris Addams and Michael Davis
8. The New York Times - Sunday August 10,1997 pg 6E,  
"This penal colony learned a lesson"
9. Jail Journal by John Mitchell
10. Charles Elliot R.N. 1801-1875  
A Servant of Britain overseas by Clagette Blake

Credits to our New Jersey, U.S.A. friends:

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