The Mifflin Township
Historic Messenger

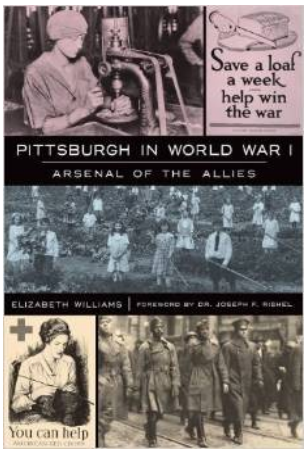
Issue No. 6 **Volume No. 1** **May 2015**

Serving the communities of West Mifflin, Homestead, West Homestead, Munhall, Duquesne, Clairton, West Elizabeth, Whitaker, Dravosburg, Pleasant Hills, Jefferson, Hays, Lincoln Place and parts of Baldwin.

This Month's Speaker Topic: *Our Rivers*

Society President Daniel Burns will present "A Brief History of Pittsburgh's Rivers." From the paddlewheel days of Tom Sawyer through our industrial development, Pittsburgh rivers have played an important part of our region's growth and expansion. The subject matter will include: the "Bomber in the Mon," the hidden fourth river, and the surprising materials that we depend on the rivers to bring us. The meeting is **Wednesday, May 13 at 7:00 pm**

May's *"What's Your History?"* Night at B&N Features



Elizabeth Williams is a Pittsburgh native and the college archivist at La Roche College. She earned her BA in history with a minor in marketing from La Roche College in 2007, and her MA in public history from Duquesne University in 2009. She previously worked as an assistant archivist at Duquesne University. Her book, *Pittsburgh in World War I, Arsenal of the Allies* traces the remarkable story of Pittsburgh during the Great War. With over 250 mills and factories, the Steel City and Allegheny County produced half of the steel and much of the munitions used by the Allies. Pittsburgh gave more than steel--sixty thousand men went to war, and women flocked to the front lines as nurses. One of the first gas masks on the western front was developed at the Mellon Institute, while the city's large Red Cross provided tireless support on the home front. Elizabeth will speak at the Barnes and Noble at the Waterfront on **Tuesday, May 26th at 7:00 pm.** Don't miss out!

Events & Happenings

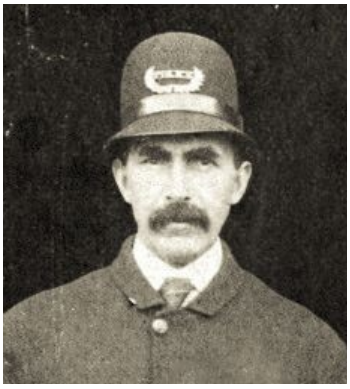
The Hays Foundation will host a celebration on May 23, 2015 from noon until 4:00 p.m. at Harden Place. The Hays Mansion located off of Whitaker Way and 8th Avenue in Munhall, (behind Firehouse #5). The Hays family and friends are working hard cleaning the mansion so that you may take a look at our progress and envision our future. Lunch will be provided and entertainment by Johnny Fontaine. RSVP to jdeibel@abrahamhaysfoundation.org

Memorial Day celebration Monday, May 15 at Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall and Museum. This is a free community event children's activities and a patriotic concert by the BRASSROOTS Band. The event kicks off at 11:00 am with a ceremony for fallen Pennsylvania service men and women. There will be food and drinks available for purchase.

Sunday, June 28th from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm, the MTHS is having a gala at Dorothy 6 Blast Furnace Café on 8th Avenue in Homestead. The cost is $20 per person and that includes a beer or wine and Hors-d'oeuvre. Proceeds benefit the Mifflin Township Historical Society. Check our web site at mifflintownship.org for more information and ticket purchase.

From Charlestown, Ireland to Duquesne, Pennsylvania

By Daniel Burns



John "Jack" Gallagher was born in Charlestown, Ireland in the County of Mayo on January 6, 1856. At his parent's urging, Jack left home at the age of 13 to live with his half-brother Patrick and his wife in Liverpool, England. "There is nothing for you here, a better life is not in Ireland," his father told him. So with only enough money in his pocket to cross the Irish Sea, Jack walked down the lane and never saw his parents again. Patrick, the son of a previous marriage, was fifteen years older than Jack. Patrick's mother had died in the Potato Famine of 1846 and his father had remarried. For six years, Jack worked beside Patrick in the coal mines of Liverpool until he was 19. By that time both Jack and Patrick had saved enough money to travel to America.

Three Minutes with the Champ

One night while in an English pub, Jack and Patrick found themselves being entertained by a traveling wrestling exhibition. A 5 dollar gold piece was offered to anyone in the crowd who could wrestle the champ for three minutes without being pinned. At first there were no takers. The formidable looking Englishman standing before them in the makeshift ring had a reputation for not only being very strong but the country's best grappler. What pub goers weren't aware of that night was that among them, there was a young Irishman who had a passion for wrestling and he was good at it. Jack, barely 19 at the time, had been wrestling since he was a young lad back home. He had grappled with the best in Charlestown and if anyone in the pub stood a chance to win the gold piece, it was Jack and Patrick knew it. "Go on, you can take him, Jack," Patrick told him. After much prodding by Patrick that he was good enough to go the distance and maybe even surprise the champ with a move or two, young Jack Gallagher agreed, he removed his shirt and climbed into the ring.

The first minute or so was uneventful with Jack believing that the champ was just playing with him. After all, this was an exhibition. He quickly realized that the only chance he had to win was if the Englishman would underestimate him so he was sure to not let on that he knew how to wrestle till just the right time. It wasn't long before Jack got his chance. After some posturing for the crowd, the champ made a careless move. Young Gallagher quickly seized the opportunity, put the champ in an unbreakable hold and pinned him to the floor.

The champ was livid. After Jack released his hold, the champ sprang to his feet, pushed his fist and fingers into Jack's chest and screamed, "You embarrassed me! No one embarrasses me and I want a rematch!" Jack refused the champ's demand telling him, "I'm not giving you a rematch, you'll tear me apart!" To which the champ replied, "You bet I will".

It took some time, but eventually the champ cooled off as they talked and even laughed about the event over a few pints. The champ even offered Jack a job as his protégé telling him he was the best he'd seen. Jack refused as he believed that his new life was ahead of him in America. Jack never spent the gold piece he won that day.

Rough Seas

In 1877, Jack and Patrick began their trans-Atlantic journey on board a ship to America traveling steerage, not the most deluxe accommodations but the only way of passage that the Gallaghers could afford. Throughout the compartment, there were basins filled with water so that the passengers of that class could wash their faces in the morning and somewhat freshen up for the day.

Shortly after the ship put to sea, another steerage passenger, an Englishman, began to pick on Jack. One of the ways that he harassed him was that he would get in front of Jack at the wash up basin and deliberately dirty the water before Jack could use it.

Even in his youth Jack Gallagher was a patient man but after this occurred repeatedly, Jack told the Englishman, "Do it once more and I'll throw you overboard." The bully laughed at young Gallagher until he again dirtied the water. With one swift and agile move, Jack picked up the shocked ruffian, hoisted him over the rail and threw him into the sea.

Bells began to sound all about the ship as the crew scurried to rescue the man from his cold embarrassing bath and he was eventually brought back aboard. As for Jack, he was immediately taken into custody, incarcerated and kept under guard for the remainder of the voyage.

Upon reaching America, Jack was released after the Englishman refused to bring charges.

Settling in Duquesne

Although both were experienced miners, only Jack got a job working in the coal mines of Western Pennsylvania. Patrick found work with the railroad and made his home in Pitcairn. Jack first settled in Port Perry, a small community on the Monongahela River which is now modern day Braddock.

He met a girl in Pittsburgh who was originally from Swinford, a town in Ireland about ten miles south of where he was raised in Charlestown. Although the two had never laid eyes on each other in Ireland, they fell in love and were married. Together Jack and his wife Bridget raised five sons and two daughters.

They stayed in Port Perry until moving first to the Patterson Hollow area of Duquesne before finally building a house on South Fourth Street.

Duquesne Police Department circa 1909

Jack Gallagher continued to work in the coal mines until the steel industry arrived in the Mon Valley. Around 1895, he went to work in one of the area's mills. Exactly which mill is not known for sure, however it is believed that he worked in McKeesport because he had burn marks on his body consistent with one who worked around a Bessemer Converter where sparks from the steel would burn right through a man's clothing. At that time there were no converters in Duquesne. Sometime later, Jack went to work in the Duquesne mill because he could then walk to work. Jack loved to walk.

Around the turn of the century, Jack Gallagher left his job in the Carnegie Steel Mill and became Officer Gallagher of the Duquesne Police Department where he served the community for about 17 years.

Continued in the June issue

10 Ways to Jumpstart Your Eastern European Research

(continued)

Lisa A. Alzo shows you the steps to track down your Eastern European roots

6. WATCH A VIDEO

If you aren't quite sure how to find your immigrant ancestors in Ancestry.com's databases, there's a video for that. Want to learn how to read Russian, or use online images from different Czech archives? There are videos for these subjects, too. Ancestry.com and FamilySearch have extensive libraries full of helpful videos and tutorials for researchers of all levels. Also, don't forget YouTube, *www.youtube.com,* where you'll find many videos (and even entire channels) dedicated to genealogy.

7. TRY A NEW DATABASE OR SEARCH TECHNIQUE

Many genealogists tend to be creatures of habit. We find certain genealogy databases or websites that we like, and then stick with them for all of our searches. But, I've learned that when I try something new, I usually learn something new and, sometimes, I discover something new as well.

Change up your search techniques in a favorite database by experimenting with different fields, or using alternate views to display results (where available). For example, if you always view your search results on Ancestry. com by record, click to view them by category. If you routinely just check the Card Catalog to find what databases are available, try using the place pages. You may find more success using a genealogy search engine like Mocavo, *www.mocavo.com,* that scours millions of hard-to-find genealogy web pages, instead of just a broad Google search. If you aren't familiar with My-Heritage.com, or haven't visited the site recently, plug your ancestors' name into their site and see what hints their new "Record Detective" technology turns up (read more on how it works on the MyHeritage.com Blog at *http://tinyurl.com/bz4nexp*).

8. SHARE YOUR BRICK WALL

Have you posted your perplexing research problems to the appropriate surname or locality message board? Try the boards at Ancestry, *http://boards.ancestry.com*, or Yahoo!, *http://dir.yahoo.com/arts/humanities/history/genealogy/regional_and_ethnic_resources*, or subscribe to the FEEFHS Mailing List, *http://lists.rootsweb.ancestry.com/index/other/Genealogical_Societies/ FEEFHS.html.*
By engaging in the simple process of writing out what you know, how you know it, and what you are trying to find out, you might just see your genealogy challenge in a new light. Posting a problem to a message board gives you the opportunity to interact with thousands of others who are researching that same surname or that same small village in Galicia.

You never know who may have the information you need. In addition, don't forget to check out the FamilySearch Research Communities on Facebook, *http://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Research_ Communities_on_Facebook* for the localities you're researching.

9. ATTEND A GENEALOGY CONFERENCE

There are plenty of opportunities to learn from interacting with others who are interested in genealogy and to learn new skills from the experts at larger conferences, and smaller all-day workshops. There are even events dedicated specifically to how to research in Eastern Europe, including the annual workshop held by Foundation of Eastern European Family History Studies (FEEFHS), *www.feefhs.org,* in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Polish Genealogical Society of America (PGSA), *www.pgsa.org,* and the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI), *www.cgsi.org,* host international conferences, as well as other special symposiums and educational opportunities.

10. HIRE A PRO

Contrary to popular belief, not all records are online. In fact, many of the key documents you will likely need to trace your East European ancestry are tucked away in the basements of foreign archives. Sure, you can submit a research request, but be prepared for a very long wait. A better option is to hire a professional based in that country (who knows the language and is familiar with the archives) to get what you can't. You'll likely save both time and money in the long run. Just be sure to exhaust all of your North American sources first, so you don't spend money on records you could have obtained through FHL microfilm or digitized records, or another online collection.

You can often find the best researchers by asking fellow genealogists, getting referrals from ethnic genealogical societies (such as CGSI or PGSA), or talking to experts at conferences. You can also find recommendations through the Association of Professional Genealogists, *www.apgen.org*, the Board for Certification of Genealogists, *www.bcgcertification.org* , or by searching Cyndi's List, *www.cyndislist.com/professionals.*

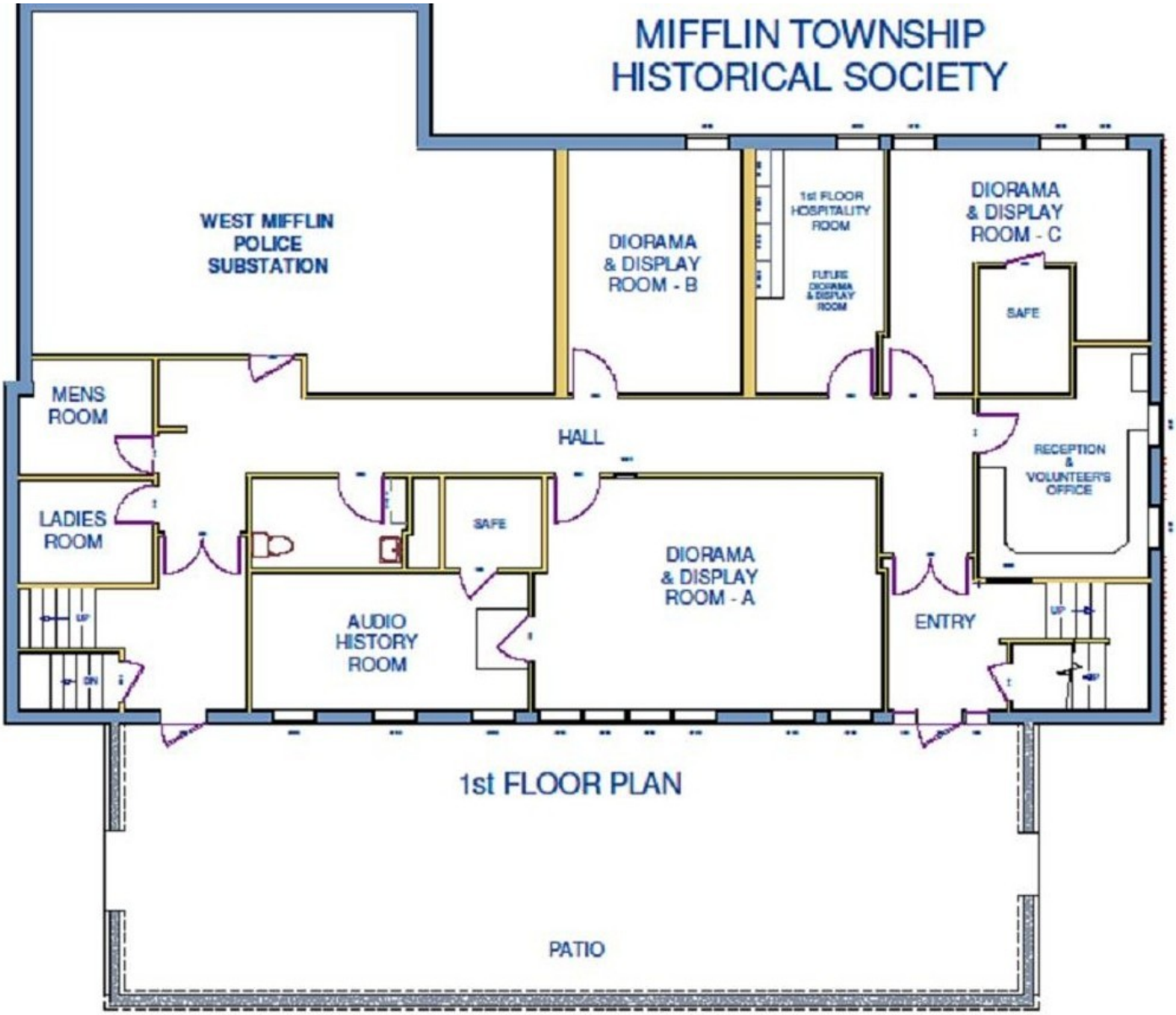
ONE FINAL STEP

If it is financially feasible and you are able to travel, nothing beats a trip back to the ancestral homeland to walk in your ancestors' footsteps, and perhaps meet up with long-lost cousins. Such a journey back to your origins helps to bring your research full circle. Certainly, tracing your East European ancestors can be a challenge, but it is well worth the work. Follow the steps above and you'll be cruising along the routes to your roots in no time!

[This article first appeared in the **Tracing Your Eastern European Ancestors** special issue of *Internet Genealogy Magazine*, and is reprinted with permission. To order a copy of this special issue go to http://your-genealogy-history-store-usa.myshopify.com/collections/tracing-your-ancestors-series. Enter the code **LA201520%** to save 20%].

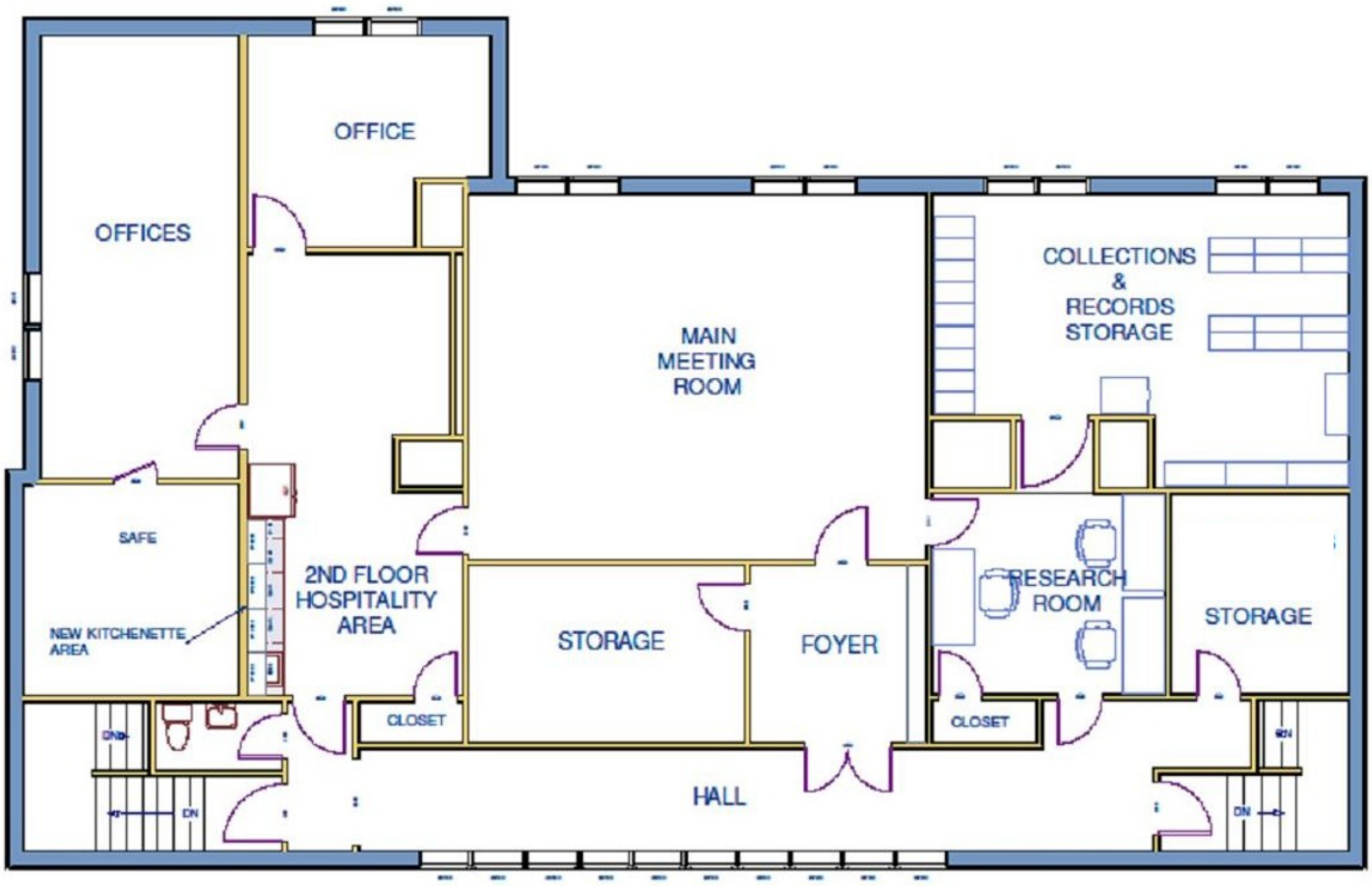
Lisa A. Alzo, M.F.A., is a freelance writer, instructor, and internationally recognized lecturer, specializing in Slovak/Eastern European genealogical research, writing your family history, and using the Internet to trace female and immigrant ancestors. She is the author of nine books and hundreds of magazine articles. Visit http://www.lisaalzo.com for more information.

Society Makes Changes Laying out New Floor Plans to Maximize Building Space



Allegheny Council member Bob Macey, West Mifflin Council President Michael Moses and West Mifflin Councilman Daniel Davis were among the two-dozen volunteers breaking a serious sweat helping the society move. On Saturday May 2, we moved not to a different location, but shuffled furniture, records, books and boxes from the first floor of our building to the second.

Moving the offices to the second floor enables the society to fulfill it's mission as we will not only keep and preserve local history but display it as well. The new layout also allows more room for our research and materials collection.



2 nd FLOOR PLAN

The MTHS is Having a Party and You're Invited!

ADMIT ONE

When?: Sunday June 28th
Where?: Dorothy 6 Blast Furnace Café
224 East 8th Ave., Homestead
Time? 4pm to 7pm
What Do I get?: Hors-d'oeuvre & Choice of a Beer or Wine
Cost?: $20.00 Per Person (no children please)
Check our web site for ticket information

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Proceeds Benefit the Mifflin Township Historical Society

The society newsletter is published monthly and emailed to all paid members. Our office is located at 4733 Greensprings Ave., the site of the former West Mifflin police station and is staffed by volunteers. The hours of operation are Tuesday & Wednesday 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 pm and Thursday Noon until 8:00 pm. Special appointments can be made by calling the office at (412) 205-3400.

Our thanks to our partners

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Volunteers aren't paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless. We could use your help.

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(412) 205-3400

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For memberships & renewals: fill in **ALL FIELDS** and return by mail or go on-line to *www.mifflintownship.org* to use our secure server.

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(Out of state. Newsletter only)
- ☐ 1 Year $20.00

All memberships are on a yearly basis

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