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ACHS NEWSLETTER

ACHS Newsletter

November 2023

Inside this issue:

From the Lab	2
Bobby's Pathway	3
Following His Footsteps	4
Bobby—My Teacher	5
Pam Wins Major Award	6
History News	7
Buy Your Calendar	8

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NEWSLETTER EDITOR

David J. Murrah

A SPECIAL EDITON dedicated to Rockport's outstanding Texas history teacher Bobby Jackson

This is a special edition of the ACHS Newsletter and is dedicated in honor of Rockport's outstanding former Texas history teacher Bobby Jackson.

For 45 years, Bobby delighted more than a thousand of seventh graders with his innovative impersonations of historical Texas figures. As he told a *Texas Monthly* reporter in 2012, "History is much more than names, dates and facts," said Jackson. "I tell my students the definition of history is in the name itself. History is a story, or stories, of real people, places and things. It's not necessarily the most famous and well-known people, but everybody, including the ordinary man or woman. . . . I try to make history come alive so they will never forget it."

And, as you will see from the enclosed articles by family and friends of Bobby, those students never forgot. And, Bobby made great contributions to the community and his church; in 2006, he was named Rockport's Citizen of the Year. In 2005, he was named the South Texas Secondary Teacher of the Year. He spoke to dozens of clubs and groups; his last public appearance at ACHS's program on the



Bobby at his unique and colorful desk in 2012.
Photo by Jeff Wilson.

1919 Storm set record attendance for a Society meeting. Bobby, you have been a wonderful asset to this community and we appreciate you so very much.

Sincerely, from your friends at The Aransas County Historical Society.

FROM THE LAB: A message from the President

We had a great turnout for our Sunday afternoon Premiere on October 22 when we unveiled the new 2024 Historical Society Calendar of Historical Photos. Thanks to all of you who attended. You can buy the new calendar from the Historical Society webpage at achs1985.org or at these retail locations: **New Beginnings, Rockport Center for the Arts, Rockport Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center, History Center, Griffith and Brundrett Surveying, Albin Exterminating, Rockport Printing and Splendid Sun Books and Gifts.** Due to increases in printing and paper the price is now \$15.00.

Congratulations to the winners of the 2023 Photo Contest; third place went to **Elizabeth Sims Hufft**, second to **Patsy Parr**, and first place to **The History Center for Aransas County and the Connie Hagar Cottage Sanctuary.** Honorable Mentions went to **Jerry Ayers, Patsy Parr,** and **Donna Dickenson.**



In September 2019, Bobby Jackson portrayed his great-grandfather E.H. Norvell on the 100th Anniversary of the 1919 Storm. Photo courtesy Veronika Camehl.

I hope you enjoy this special edition Newsletter devoted to our friend, historian and teacher **Bobby Jackson**, who is also a former Trustee of the Historical Society. Board member **Janie White** said that Bobby Jackson not only portrayed historical figures, he became them. Over his 45-year teaching career, Bobby was the favorite teacher of hundreds of seventh graders.

Bobby's last public appearance was for a 2019 Historical Society program commemorating the 100th

anniversary of the Storm of 1919. It was a standing room only crowd with numerous students sitting with their parents who had been Bobby's students. These moms and dads were eager to share the magic of a beloved teacher. Thank you, Bobby Jackson, for all you did for thousands of students and for our community.

—Cheryl Livingston



Above left: Jerry Harrell Ayers won Honorable Mention honors for two of her entries.

Above: Donna Dickenson also earned Honorable Mention for her submission.

Left: Elizabeth Sims Hufft submitted the Third Place winner, which also was chosen for the Calendar cover.

Photos courtesy Veronika Camehl.



Long-time ACHS member **Patsy Parr** poses with her photo which won Honorable Mention in the 2023 Photo Contest. She also won 2nd place with another picture. Photo courtesy Veronika Camehl.



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Bobby Jackson: His Pathway to Becoming a Local Legend

by
John Jackson

[Editor's Note: ACHS Trustee John Jackson gives us a glimpse of Jackson family life in the making of a great teacher.]

Bobby and I were part of the post WWII baby generation here in Rockport and were only 13 months apart in age. Many of our mother's friends jokingly referred to Bobby, the last of the four Norvell and Neva Jackson children, as the "oops baby"! The first was our sister Mary Lucille who was born in 1942 during WWII. Our older brother NF came along in 1946 and I followed in 1950 and Bobby in 1951.

With having been that close in age, Bobby and I both started off dressing the same, almost as if we were twins, and



John (right) and Bobby Jackson, c. 1955. Photo courtesy NF Jackson.

even both had burr haircuts for a few years, as shown in a favorite photo our mother had taken of us. We also shared identical life experiences all the way through school and college. We were raised in a modest home at 801 North Magnolia, with us three boys sharing the same room for a while, and of course our sister had a much larger room to herself. We were only one-half block from Rockport Elementary school on Live Oak, one block from the Boy Scout Hut on Live Oak, and about three blocks from the Little League Park. Our church, First Presbyterian, where we grew up worshipping, was only two blocks

away, and the Rockport Harbor was six blocks where our family business, Jackson Seafood, was located and operated for 75 years.

Something pivotal happened during the experience at Camp Karankawa for Bobby, which became the spark for Bobby's legendary 45-year teaching career. I was the Aquatics Director for several years at the camp swimming pool and Bobby was one of four or five other swimming counselors on the staff during that time. Scouts from all over South Texas would come to camp for a one-week stay and



The Jackson siblings in 1988: (L to R) NF, Bobby, Mary Lucille, and John Jackson. From John Jackson, *Taking the Tide*.

would spend as much time at the pool as they could. Scouts were allowed in certain depths of the pool based on a swimming ability test they took when they checked in to camp at the beginning of the week. From the very beginning, Bobby was assigned to work with the "non-swimmers" for their week's stay. With only one week to work with the boys, Bobby's work was challenging for him and his students. But by



The Jackson family onboard, c. 1955: Norvell and Neva Jackson with their four children: Bobby (left), John, Mary Lucille, and NF. Photo from John Jackson's book, *Taking the Tide: My Family's Ebb and Flow in Rockport, Texas*.

the end of each week, he consistently celebrated a 70-80% success record teaching kids how to swim, a major accomplishment in those boy's lives at the time. Many years later, as Bobby was winding down his teaching career, he said he got the teaching-bug at Camp Karankawa when he was a teenager teaching kids how to swim.

Bobby and I, along with our older brother NF, were all very involved in Scouting, each of us becoming an Eagle Scout. Bobby and I played Little League baseball together. We were in the same Sunday school classes and sang next to each other in the choir, he being a tenor and me a baritone. Another memorable experience during this time for both of us was when we rode out Hurricane Celia in 1970 with our dad while trying to save our three-generation business and our fleet of boats while fearing for our own lives.

We both graduated from high school a year apart; I accepted scholarships to go to Texas A & I University in Kingsville, and he did the same the following year. We even lived in the same dorm during his freshman year and for a while shared the same car. I was in the Business school there while Bobby entered the school of Education.

By the mid-1970s, we both had our Master's degrees. I came home to the family business, Jackson Seafood, and spent 17 years navigating the ups and downs of the commercial fishing industry. That story is told in my book, *Taking the Tide*. But for Bobby, he started his teaching career at Aransas County ISD in 1975, almost all of which was teaching 7th grade Texas History. And over the years that followed he received many teaching accolades which were deserved and well known, and once in his career he was even highlighted in a Texas Monthly magazine article which put him in the state-wide spotlight on top of his reputation he had earned here in the Coastal Bend.

Bobby had an exciting and contagious passion for Texas History, and was known as a teacher who came to class and acted out historical characters in costume. He was well known for his "Armadillo Gang" field trips for his students to historical sites. In Rockport, you can't go with him anywhere without Bobby being approached by former students giving him hugs and best wishes. The Education Foundation annually recognizes "Shining Star" graduating seniors who are asked to choose a teacher who made a

[Continued on Page 5—see Pathway]

A Challenging Task: Following in the Footsteps of Bobby Jackson

by
Joseph Fox

[Editor's Note: ACHS Trustee Joseph Fox recently became Seventh Grade History Teacher at Rockport-Fulton Middle School after serving as curator for the Fulton Mansion.]

The Coastal Bend of Texas has been blessed with a generation of gifted writers and historians to tell its story. However, in terms of impact, there is one man who three generations of Rockporters will tell you about when Texas History comes up – Bobby Jackson. As a current Texas History teacher at the same school he taught, I never got to see Mr. Jackson teach but can see his legacy reflected in memory by his students.

Bobby Jackson made Texas history come alive by bringing living history to a whole new level. He literally “dressed the part” and energetically played roles as different historical figures, allowing his students not only witnessed his amazing performances (which sometimes even involved jumping up on desks!) but learned what people in the past felt and experienced. In short, Mr. Jackson’s class had a depth and passion to it that made it exciting for his students to learn Texas history.

Mr. Jackson was also not just a performer, but also a skilled historian. As a college student, he conducted oral histories with his grandparents and others in Rockport on the 1919 Storm. Students would know that he was not just making up stupendous stories; he could play an oral recording from his grandmother describing the 1919 Storm which would give the students window into the past that went beyond from just reading a textbook or taking notes from a Power Point lecture.

For after school activities, Bobby created the Armadillo Gang “—not a “Club” but a “Gang”— as several former members have told me. The Gang allowed interested students to dive deeper into Texas History through interactive performances and site visits. Once a year he took the Gang to see the holiest of Texas history sites, the Alamo in San Antonio.

I now teach Texas history at the same school Mr. Jackson taught, and I’ve inherited quite a tradition to live up to. How can I fill those shoes and make a similar impact? I’m currently trying to bring back living history and artifact-based learning in the classroom. My biggest goal is resurrecting the legendary Armadillo Gang for a new generation, but the obstacles are huge. There is a huge crisis facing the country in terms of declining civic knowledge and political polarization. Modern Americans find cell phones more interesting than learning about the previous generations. Modern professional historians at times seem they are more interested in “deconstructing” the past than making it come alive for the public. How can a Texas History teacher today make an impact the way Mr. Jackson did?

I had the chance to visit Bobby this past summer and he was kind enough to spare a few minutes to talk with me and offer



Austin photographer Jeff Wilson took this great photo of Bobby Jackson in action portraying Enrique Esparza for *Texas Monthly's* feature article on Bobby in the September 2012 issue. Entitled “Confessions of a Seventh-Grade History Teacher” and written by John Spong, the article gives a detailed and fascinating look at Bobby’s innovative teaching methods which made him the most popular teacher ever in the Rockport-Fulton school system. The *Texas Monthly* article is available online at the following link: <https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/confessions-of-a-seventh-grade-texas-history-teacher/>

encouragement as I was preparing for the upcoming semester.

The truth is there will never be another Bobby Jackson, and the legacy left behind by a beloved educator is permanent. Students today remember hearing from their older siblings, parents, and grandparents about Mr. Jackson’s class. Their eyes light up when I present an artifact, dress as a character, or tell an old Texas story that you won’t find in the textbook. Educators like Mr. Jackson blazed a beautiful trail for us to follow. It is up to Texans today to continue the journey.



Bobby Jackson’s Armadillo Gang enjoyed outings to local historical sites as well as traveling to San Antonio to visit the Alamo. This group of seventh graders made a trip to Goliad in 2018 to visit the Texas Revolutionary War sites there. Photo from Rockport-Fulton Middle School Year Book, 2018, courtesy Joseph Fox.

Bobby Jackson Was My Teacher

by
Brad Brundrett

[Editor's Note—Brad Brundrett is a Trustee for the Aransas County Historical Society and a member of the Rockport City Council.]

Being a seventh-generation Texan and raised in Rockport, I have an appreciation for history, especially Texas history. In Texas, junior high seventh grade (now middle school) students are enrolled in a class covering Texas history. When I was a seventh-grader in 1992-93, Texas history became the most favorite class of my entire education, including my years in college. One of those people that made this class so enjoyable was Mr. Bobby Jackson. Although I had his cohort Teacher (Mrs. Vernon), during times of grouping, we were able to get together and learn as groups of two classes together.

Mr. Jackson as well as Mrs. Vernon took this class to a level that many do not get to see, with costumes, props, projects, and field trips, all designed to keep seventh-grade brains engaged in education when most have other things on their minds. Mr. Jackson would dress as Alamo characters, along with all the legends of Texas that most know--Houston, Austin, Lamar—and, we were always surprised by what would happen in class.

One of my most memorable events was when we were tasked with creating a journal of our times of the Siege of the Alamo. We were given real characters that fought at the Alamo and were asked to write about our times, thoughts, and concerns during the siege. I can remember taking craft paper soaking in a solution of tea/coffee/soy, letting it dry, then binding with leather boot laces. Once this was completed, I started my journal. I talked about the noises one would hear, lack of food, smells, and thoughts of not making it out alive but the greater good that would come for Texas Independence. Such a project would not have been possible without the education given by these excellent educators. They made history so much fun learning a subject that is often passed over by many.

It is of no surprise to me and many others that so many accolades and interviews have been bestowed upon Mr. Jackson. He is truly one of a kind when it comes to engaging the minds of his students, whether they be of adolescent or adult, no matter the age, he got your attention when he was “preaching” the history of Texas. I am blessed to have had the opportunity to learn from such people that truly cared for the education of their students.

[Pathway—continued from P. 3]

lasting difference in their lives, and Bobby has been chosen almost every year since 2001. He retired in 2020.

Bottom line, Bobby has become a legendary educator here in Aransas County with no doubt. He chose one of the lowest paid but the noblest of professions and made a multi-generational lasting mark on the Jackson family. I'm sure that our parents and our sister, Mary Lucille would also be as proud of him as my brother NF and I are, as well as our extended family.



Bobby Jackson advertised Texas' rich history, even while walking the halls of the Rockport-Fulton Middle School, as captured in this 2012 photo by Austin photographer Jeff Wilson. Photo courtesy of Jeff Wilson.

Bobby Jackson Was My Classmate

by
Veronika Camehl

[Editor's note—Veronika Camehl has for several years served as the official photographer for the Aransas County Historical Society, and her husband Ernie serves as a Trustee.]

When I was asked to write a little something about my good friend Bobby I was somewhat hesitant. How in the world do I write about such a long time friend and do it justice? It was 1958 when we first met at Rockport Elementary and here we are so many years later still “buds”. All through elementary school, Junior High (now called Middle School) and High School, we had good times. Never any type of romantic “stuff” just great friends.

After high school we went our different ways...him to college and I married and was busy raising a family. He was always there in the church we both attended and his dedication as a church officer and choir member was such a comfort. There were some difficult and sad times that came his way but I do think that those times were made easier by the many friends who rallied around him.

The teacher he became and the knowledge he imparted to his students was beyond measure. Only one of our sons was able to take his Texas History class, I always felt that the other missed so much. The time and dedication he spent on his lessons were immeasurable. He brought characters to life that his students still talk about. The recognition he received was so well deserved.

So much more can be said but I'll close with this...if you look up the word friend in a dictionary, you will see there a photo of Bobby Jackson. Love you my dear and long time friend,

Veronika Camehl



Bobby Jackson in the classroom, 2012. Photo courtesy Rockport Pilot.



A large contingent of Pam Stranahan's history colleagues were on hand at the Aransas County Commissioners Court on Monday, November 13 for the announcement of her winning the prestigious Ruth Lester Lifetime Achievement Award from the Texas Historical Commission. Those attending included (front row, L to R) Mike Geer, Jennifer Day, Jerry Brundrett, David Murrah, the honoree Pam Stranahan, Cheryl Livingston, Doreen Bronner, who made the presentation on behalf of the County Historical Commission, Betty Stiles, Sandy Richards, Phil Stranahan, Betty Hattman, David Hattman, and Maureen Winkelman.

Members of the Commissioners Court are (back row, L to R) Jack Cheney, Bubba Casterline, County Judge Ray Garza, Pat Rousseau, and Bob Dupnik.

ACHS Trustee Pam Stranahan Named as Recipient for Texas Historical Commission's Lifetime Achievement Award

Honor to be Presented at THC meeting in April

The Ruth Lester Lifetime Achievement Award is one of the Texas Historical Commission's most prestigious honors. Since 1960, its recipients have included Governor Price Daniel, Ima Hogg, Lady Bird Johnson, Mrs. John Connally, John Ben Shepperd, Mrs. William C. Clements, Jr., Kathryn O'Connor, and the Bass Brothers.

The 2024 recipient, Pam Stranahan, has been a major force in Aransas County historical activities for two decades, and state-wide for many years. Pam was nominated for the award by Doreen Bronner and members of the Aransas County Historical Commission (ACHC) and the Historical Society

ACHC Chair Doreen Bronner made the announcement before the Commissioners Court on November 13. The nominating committee included Doreen Bronner, chair, Cheryl Livingston, David Murrah; and Betty Stiles.

Here are excerpts from the nomination form:

Pam Wheat-Stranahan is well-known throughout the state for her archaeological, historical preservation and education contributions. For over 44 years, she has been a key figure in educating, preserving, mentoring, and sharing history wherever she is. Her many publications, numerous leadership positions, awards and grants testify to Pam's hard work and dedication in support of historic preservation and education of all ages. She continues her outreach and education efforts today with her active involvement in the Texas Archaeological Society (named as Fellow in 2011), the Aransas County Historical Commission, the Aransas County Historical Society and The History Center of Aransas County which is also affiliated to Aransas County Pathways.

Pam's state-wide historical focus began as teacher and administrator in Houston public and private schools. She directed and developed many archaeo-

logical and educational programs for museums and archaeological centers in and out of Texas to include preparing a major archaeological exhibit at the Houston Children's Museum grand opening. She served as Educational Coordinator for the dramatic recovery of the La Salle ship, the *La Belle*, and traveled widely to tell that story. One of Pam's books, *La Salle in Texas: A Teacher's Guide for Age of Discovery and Exploration*, "incorporated the standards for national social studies and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. The resulting guide is user-friendly for teachers and provides interactive learning opportunities for students not just about Texas history but also concerning the age of discovery and the precursors to the American nation." according to the Texas State Historical Association website. "*La Salle in Texas* is an excellent model of how to make learning Texas history fun and exciting for everyone." wrote the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* in 2009. Pam's educational book is still in use as a resource for Texas teachers.

Upon retirement, Pam's move to Rockport brought the city's historical organizations grant-writing, management expertise and energy. She quickly became an active part of all things history and was elected a Trustee for the Aransas County Historical Society. Pam's strong leadership was evident as she spearheaded and co-chaired the Texas Historical Commission's Visionaries in Preservation program for the county, recruiting dozens of organizations and volunteers, a project which greatly improved heritage tourism by developing signage, documenting historic structures, and creating walking and driving tours. Pam began serving on the original steering committee of Aransas Pathways, a publically-funded project that coordinates the promotion of the area's natural beauty and recreational opportunities, and showcases the county's rich history thereby increasing tourism to the area. She is also an active part of the local chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, is a founding member and has held several executive positions for the board of the Friends of the History Center for Aransas County, which opened in 2014. Its opening was made possible by a major grant for \$40,000 that Pam secured along with support from Aransas Pathways. Her dedication to the community was recognized in 2014 when the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce named her and her husband Phil Stranahan as its Citizens of the Year.

Model T's Make Historic Visit to Rockport and Return Once Again to the Born-Again Rockport Depot

by Jennifer Day



In the picture above left, a 1923 Model T waits at the Rockport Depot with the large crowd there to greet the train. Nearly a hundred years later, a large crowd in the picture at right was on hand in October to greet the Texas Model T Party and to commemorate the historic picture at left. Thanks to the Rockport Cultural Arts District, the Depot was saved to serve as a railroad museum and transportation center. Thanks go to ACHS Vice President Ty Husak for capturing the photo at right through drone technology.

Photo at left from the Gordon Stanley Post Card Collection in the ACHS Digital Photo Collection; photo at right courtesy Ty Husak and the Rockport Cultural Arts District.

The Model T Party in Rockport was a great success and the event christened the recent renovations to the historic Rockport Depot.

On October 18-21, the the Rockport Cultural Arts District sponsored and welcomed the Texas "T" Party to our community.



C. G. "Turf" Overturf of Rockport was on hand to greet the Model T's at the Depot. Turf played a significant role in saving the Depot for historical use by organizing a group to help preserve it. Photo by David Murrah.

It was the 46th Annual Statewide Model "T" Party for the group which included approximately 100 Ford Model T's and their owners who experienced Rockport-Fulton's coastal charm and shared their unique heritage transportation experience from 100 years ago.

The four-day event featured many road trips, photo ops, and parades. Daily events featured a trip to Port

Aransas with a drive by Rockport Live Oak Learning Center on the way, photo ops at the Fulton Mansion, Model T games at the Aransas County Airport including a raffle for a ride in a biplane, lunch at the Presidio La Bahia in Goliad and mini parade at Goliad Elementary School, drives on the Big Tree on Goose Island, a parade through Fulton and Rockport ending at the Historic Rockport Railroad Depot.



The Model T parade in downtown Rockport in October. Photo by David Murrah.

By the time of the group's visit to the Depot, RCAD had finished adding

a covered porch on the east end of the building, thereby restoring it to its original form. RCAD acquired the historic Railroad Depot in May 2021, restored the badly damaged building, and in May 2022, opened the Rockport Railroad Museum. The Railroad Museum is located in the center of the Cultural Arts and Heritage Districts, at 105 South Magnolia Street, and is surrounded by a new District Parking Lot, a vision RCAD proactively initiated.

Restoration of the Depot has attracted cultural and heritage tourists, including the significant existing network of railroad enthusiasts, museum and history buffs, families and students. The most recent restoration of the front entrance replicates the original entrance as shown in the photo above.

There was time for our Model T guests to shop, dine, enjoy the beach, and enjoy entertainment at local venues, including silent films at Rockport Little Theatre. The "T" Party ended Saturday evening October 21st with a banquet finale.

NEWS FROM THE HISTORY CENTER

Opening Sat. Dec. 2, 1-4 PM.

**"Historical Holiday:
A Vintage
Christmas Display"**

Step back in time and experience the magic of a bygone era this holiday season. Join us for "Historical Holiday: A Vintage Christmas Display" and relive the enchantment of yesteryears. Don't miss out on this nostalgic celebration of Christmas past. Visit us today and make cherished memories with your loved ones.

HISTORY CENTER PHOTO WINS 2023 PHOTO CONTEST

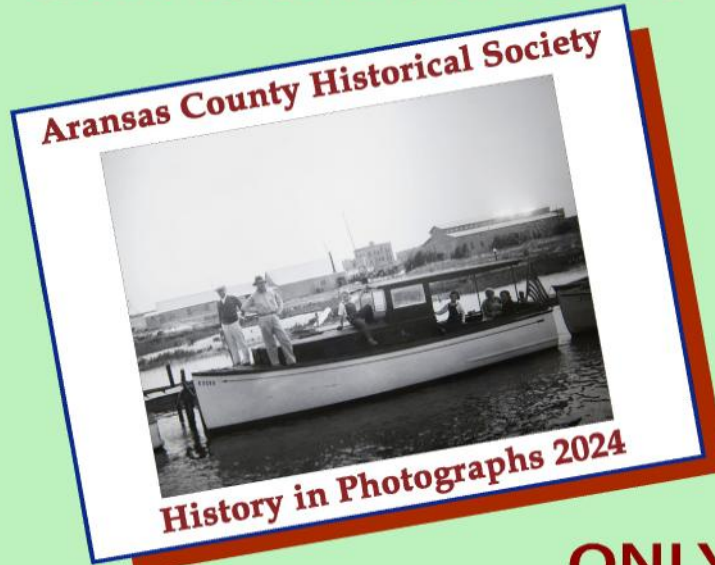
Connie Hagar and her dog Patches were captured in this 1958 photo and published in the October issue of *Nature Magazine*. The story of Connie's adoption of Patches is told in the 2024 ACHS Calendar of Historical Photographs.

The photo, submitted as an entry by the History Center for Aransas County and the Connie Hagar Cottage Sanctuary, won first place in the 2023 ACHS Photo Contest.

The winning photo along with a dozen other outstanding historical pictures, are available in the 2024 calendar. Details for where the calendars may be purchased are in the ad below. They also may be purchased online and mailed to you through the ACHS website, achs1985.org.

From the ACHS Digital Photo Collection.
From The History Center of Aransas County Photo Collection.
Courtesy of The History Center of Aransas County and the Connie Hagar
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