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Historical Society Of Pottawattamie County

Member Newsletter

September 2000

Quick Takes

Don't Forget Meeting Location Change

Historical Society Sunday meetings have been moved to the auditorium of the Western Historic Trails Center, 3434 Richard Downing Avenue in Council Bluffs. Free parking is available at the facility.

Jail Restoration Committee Formed

Acting on a motion by board member Ken Milford the board created a committee to analyze restoration needs at the squirrel cage jail. President Foutch appointed Ken to chair the committee with Cathy Danielson and Jim Knott to serve as members. The committee will consult with an architect and report back to the board.

New Cabinet Counter in Place at Depot

Society member Marvin Lausen has built a new cabinet counter for the receptionist at the Depot. Mr. Lausen donated his labor for this and other projects at the depot.

Historical Society Ready to Give Members an Informative Fall

If you haven't done so already make certain you've reserved the third Sunday afternoon for the next three months to join fellow members for a series of presentations that are sure to enlighten and entertain.

Sunday, September 17, its a look at the colorful story of Ben marks and the Hog Farm. The presentation will be provided by Mr. Ryan Roenfeldt. Iowa's president, Herbert Hoover, comes into the spotlight in a program by Abraham Lincoln High School teacher Rod Cameron October 15. The Missouri River and its history are the subject November 19 with a presentation by Brett Ford, Park Ranger at Narrows River Park. All programs start at 2 p.m.

Tomatoes an Object of Adoration 160 Years Ago

Now is the time for gathering this healthy and most desirable vegetable, which is cooked in various ways according to the peculiar taste of people. As a salad it is good-- as in omelette, with butter, eggs, and crumbs of bread, capital-- it is good stuffed and baked-- good stewed down close with a fat piece of beef and lima beans-- in short, in what position is it not good? Recently the tomato has been successfully used in medical cases. It is good for a cough-- soothing to the lungs. Use it freely in hot months to check the accumulation of bile. If you wish to dry and pack them away in bags for winter, gather them when ripe and scald them to get the skin off-- then boil them with a little sugar and salt, but no water-- spread them in thin cakes in the sun, and when dry pack them away in a dry room.

Published in the *Iowa Territorial Gazette*, (Burlington), August 29, 1840; contributed for reprint here by Darlene Vergamini

Monthly History Trivia Teaser. . .



We've frequently talked about the railway mail service in this newsletter. There was another system of moving mail in use called the "Star Route Service". How did that work?

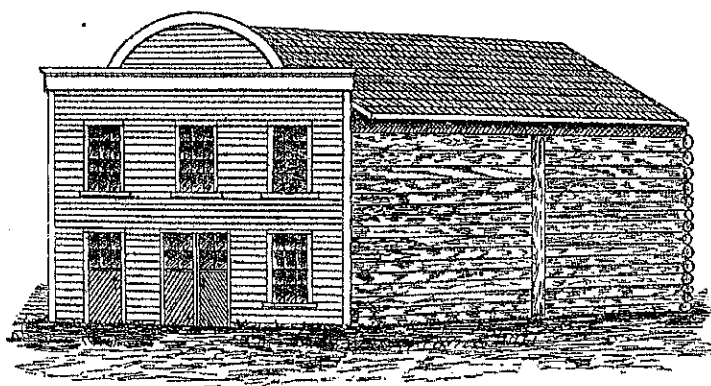
Answer is on page 6



Entertainment Halls of Council Bluffs

Life in Council Bluffs has always been more than just hard work; many entertainment halls, theaters, and auditoriums have come and gone over the years.

Among the first of the halls was



BeeBee's Hall

BeeBee's. It was built of cottonwood logs and was located on the corner of North Second Street and Broadway. The front was weather-boarded which, in those days, was considered quite a distinction. It was the principal hall in the city for many years.

The first permanent place of amusement was erected by J.M. Palmer in 1854. It was called the Concert Hall and was used for general purposes and by theatrical troupes. In 1859, Abraham Lincoln, a practicing lawyer from Springfield, Illinois, addressed a large meeting of citizens there and thus it became of historical interest. It was later destroyed by fire.

After the destruction of the Concert Hall, Henry Burhop erected a building in 1866 suitable for public assemblies. It was 42 by 80 feet with two anterooms. Balls, lectures, and dramatic performances were held there.

It was in great demand. District court

was held in the day time; balls held at night; and a church on Sunday; while the bar on the first floor served its patrons at all times. The hall, including the gallery, accommodated 400 people. It had two private or family

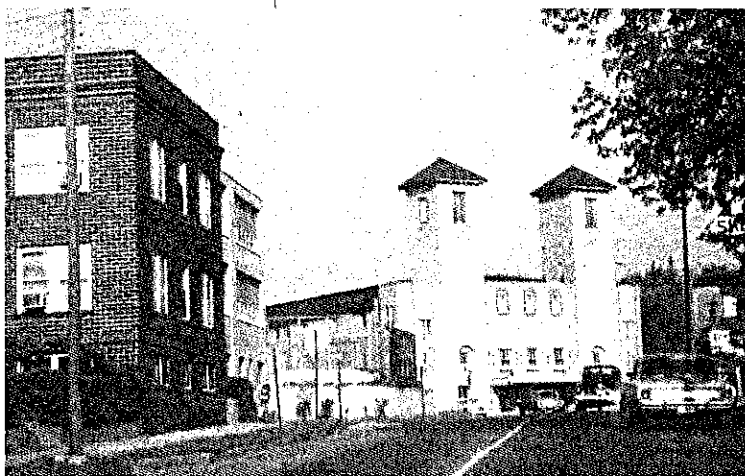
boxes. It boasted two dressing rooms and a green room. There were footlights and a drop curtain with a Turkish scene on it.

Bloom's Opera House was built on Pearl Street in 1866. It was erected by General Dodge and Solomon Bloom. The hall on the third floor was 50 by 100 feet and had the finest theatrical furnishings of

any hall for many miles around. Robert Ingersoll and Henry Dean Clay lectured from its stage.

The Dohany Opera House on Bryant Street near Vine Street was the next structure dedicated to amusement. It was completed in 1868 and opened to the public in 1871. Although it was always evident to patrons that there was a livery stable below, it was for years the most popular place for amusement in the city and nearby area. Among the celebrities who thrilled audiences there were Henry Ward Beecher, Elizabeth C. Stanton, Ole Bull, John Drew, and Camille Urso.

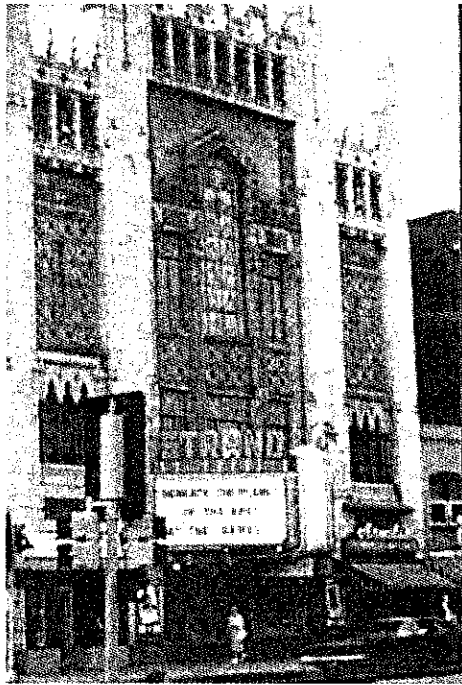
In 1891 the Salvation Army held its first meeting in Council Bluffs in this building at which Charles Beno presided. In 1893 or 1894 the building was condemned for further use as a theater. Later the building was used as a warehouse by the Peoples Store and later it was partially destroyed by



Entertainment Halls of Council Bluffs, continued...

fire.

Council Bluffs hosted the National Horticultural Congress in 1909 and a new building was built on Washington Avenue especially for the event. Though intended to be temporary (it was built in just 30 days) it remained for over sixty years as the city auditorium providing a venue for many diverse events including high school graduation ceremonies (the editor's father graduated from that building; ALHS Class of '36. The graduates dressed for the occasion in Washing-



ton School and marched across the street to the auditorium for the ceremony). The building served as the city's post office while the present Federal Building was under construction at 6th and Broadway. It was razed as a part of the urban renewal project in the early 1970's.

In 1882 a new structure called the new Dohany Theatre was built at 6th

and Broadway. In 1933 the building was incorporated under the name Strand Theater Company. The plush interior of the theater was added in 1927, featuring rich carpeting, mural, and ornate plaster work. The seven story ornate facade (see photo) was installed that year also. It was made of glazed clay tiles. Prior to use for movies the theater featured vaudeville acts and boasted a huge pipe organ. The second floor of the Strand was home to the first studios of KSWI radio, established by the Nonpareil Broadcasting Company, in 1947. The last major improvement was a cinema scope wide screen installed in 1954; the marquee was changed in the '60s.

The theater fell on hard times in the early 70's and closed in January, 1974. It was reopened a few weeks later by Joetta Cohen and Pat Maulsbury, of Omaha, who were renting the building from the estate of Morrie Snead. At 10:30 p.m., Wednesday, December 11, 1974, a fire broke out that gutted the building, causing collapse of the roof. The blaze took until 4 a.m. to bring under control.

That same week 3 years earlier another downtown landmark, Ranks, was destroyed by fire.

While the tall facade was only minimally damaged it was feared it might have been weakened and prone to collapse so traffic was routed off of Broadway for a time.

While a number of business and community leaders stepped forward to spearhead a campaign to at least save the facade if not rebuild the theater no practical ideas were to be discovered

and the facade was partially knocked down so that traffic could return to Broadway. Complete demolition took place in January. Despite having entertained tens of thousands over its 92 years the Strand closed early the night of the fire... not a single patron turned out for its last show.

Information in this article is taken from *From Trading Post to Modern City: A Brief History of Council Bluffs, Iowa* (4th Grade Social Studies Teachers, C.B. Public Schools, 1954, editorially corrected and reprinted by Robert and Marcia Hastings, 1995), *The Daily Nonpareil*, 1974, and some information about the Strand fire from personal memory; the editor was a reporter for Bluffs radio station KRCB at the time of the fire.

Illustration credits: BeeBee's Hall sketch contributed by Darlene Vergamini, city auditorium photo by Bob Warner, Jr., and Strand photo from Historical Society archives.

If nobody smiled and nobody cared
and nobody helped us along.
If every moment looked after itself and
good things always went to the strong;
If nobody cared just a little about you
and nobody cared about me,
and we stood alone, in the battle of life,
what a dreary old world this would be.

Life is sweet, just because of
friends we have made
and the things which in common we
share.

We want to live on, not because of ourselves,

but because of the people who care.
It is doing and giving for somebody else
on which all of life's splendor depends.
The joy of this world, when you've
summed it all up,
is found in the making of friends.

- - Submitted by Darlene Vergamini;
author unknown

The Danes and Their Chief Settlement in Council Bluffs

Holding the balance of power in Council Bluffs and outnumbering by far any other nationality residing in this city, prominent in business affairs and ideal in home life, the sons and daughters of Denmark are becoming each day greater potent factors in the onward march of the Bluff city. It is estimated by the best authorities that between 4,000 and 5,000 persons, one-sixth of the population of Council Bluffs, are of Danish blood.

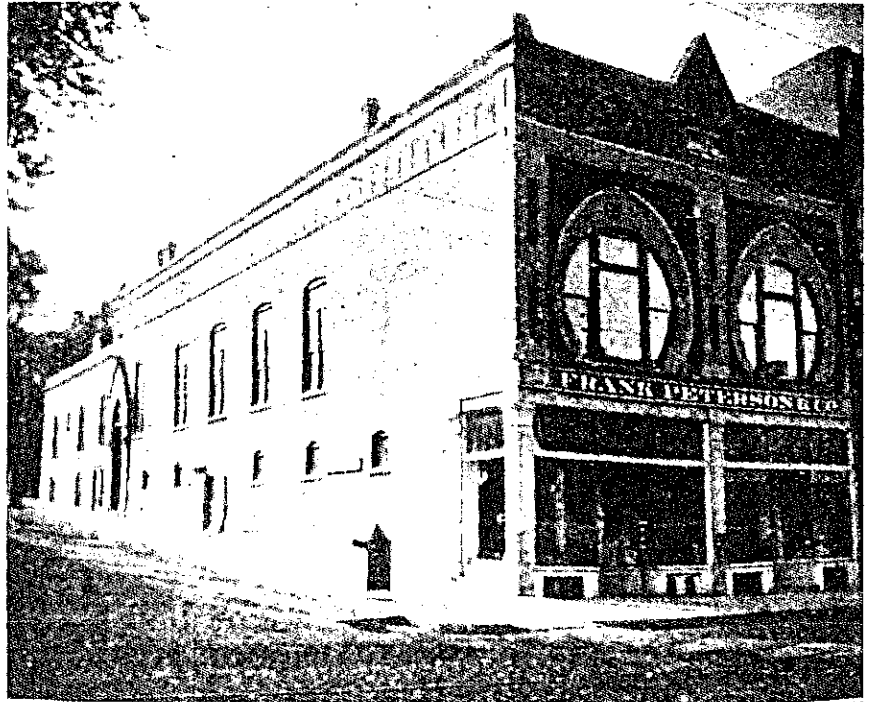
Children Bright in Schools.

In the school, the children of Danish parents, according to statements of Superintendent Clifford, are regarded as the brightest and most treatable pupils. Superintendent Clifford points with especial pride to the excellent scholarship and attendance records made at the Twentieth Avenue school, which is located in the heart of the Danish settlement. During the short period in which manual training was in vogue at the school, the work of the Danish children was pronounced the best in the city.

Despite their number, the Danes have but recently come into the limelight of politics. Handicapped as were the settlers from the old country, by being forced to acquire a new language and earn a living in a strange land. It is but natural that they were content to sit quietly by and allow others with more knowledge of existing conditions, and leisure, to assume the reins of government.

Are Well Represented.

As the Danes become more and more conversant with the new elements in their life, and the younger generation of Danish-Americans grow to manhood, they become



The Danish Hall, Broadway and Park Avenue, was a joint meeting place for several Danish organizations. The building was razed in the early 1970's.

more alert to the possibilities of their numbers. Today the council, the park commission, and the school board have each a son of Denmark as a representative. As to political affiliation, it seems that the rank and file are evenly divided into three sections, with the republicans having a slight, if any, advantage. In addition to the democratic and republican element are those on the fence who vote in accordance with their moods.

To C.O. Mynster, father of W.N. Mynster, must be ascribed the honor of being the first Dane in Council Bluffs and as far as is known, the first of his countrymen in the state of Iowa. It was in the year 1850 that C.O. Mynster visited the Bluffs with the intention of joining in the California emigration. He arrived a little too late, however, and missed the last party westward.

Established Dry Goods Store.

Impressed by the possibilities of this section of the country, Mynster brought his family from Washington, D.C., the following spring and established a retail dry goods store on the site of the present Methodist church. The building was a rude log structure, roughly lined with canvas to keep out some of the cold and as much of the rain and snow as possible. Several years later the pioneer merchant moved his store to a building on Madison street at the junction of Pearl.

For several years later no other Danes came to the Bluffs to keep company with Mynster, until finally during the latter part of the '50s the men and women from the peninsular kingdom began to arrive in a continued stream. All through the west they settled, and in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie county the stores and residences of Danes rose in great rapidity.

The people were a hardy, persevering class, with a mechanical and practical turn of mind, fond of amusements and social intercourse. Today the state of Iowa has the largest number of Danish inhabitants of any state in the union. It has been estimated that if the Danes were scattered evenly throughout the state every seventh person would be of Danish descent.

The Dane at His Best.

It is in the secret and social societies that the Dane is found at his best. Here is free from the care, fun-loving and especially neighborly. Danish banquets, dances and picnics are said to have in them an element of good fellowship and cordiality unequalled by similar events of other nationalities. With the love of entertainment as one of the national characteristics of the Danish-Americans, it is but natural that they should become enthusiastic over societies and secret organizations. Out of the total Danish population of the city, more than 800 are members of the three exclusive Danish secret and social organizations- the Danabo, the Danish Brotherhood, and the Danish Social society.

The Brotherhood, the largest society of the three,

having over 500 members in good standing, is in part of local organization, having been founded in Omaha by the members of the individual organizations in Omaha, Racine, Davenport, and Nenewa, Wisconsin. The local societies beginning the now powerful order had the qualification for membership dependent upon having served in the two great Danish wars with Schleswig-Holstein in 1848 and 1864. The veteran feature, however, was later abolished, and any Dane was eligible to membership provided he could speak and write the language of the mother country. The lodge is secret in character, having mortuary and sick benefits, in addition to aiding unemployed members to secure work.

"Danabo" is Semi-Secret.

The "danabo," meaning "lived in Denmark," is the second society in point of numbers, having a membership of 200. The order was originally founded in Wisconsin and established in the Bluffs in 1878, and is a semi-secret organization, with benefits the same as those of the brotherhood. A unique feature is the method of carrying on a meeting. According to the by-laws of the Danabo, no session can be conducted except in the Danish language and even talks must be given in this tongue unless special permission is granted by the society. In this way it is hoped to infuse into the American-born children of the Danish people love of the language of their forefathers.

To Cultivate Happiness.

Two years ago there was born in the Danish circle of Council Bluffs a new organization known as the Danish Social society, with no other object than the cultivation of the spirit of happiness and good fellowship among its members. Entertainments, dances, banquets and picnics are the aims of the club, and so successful have been these features that they are said to out rival even the pretentious "occasions" given by the other lodges. The membership is strictly limited to seventy-five, and already the quota is very near its completion.

The women are not forgotten in the social side of Danish life, and two large lodges have powerful auxiliaries in the Danier and the Danish Sisterhood, the latter being

part of the Brotherhood and the former of the Danabo.

"Danish Hall"

What these organizations have done for the city and their countrymen cannot be adequately estimated, but their stands today as a culmination of Danish enterprise and civic spirit, a handsome business block and lodge hall known as the Danish "hall", on the corner of Broadway and Park Avenue. For many years a building of their own was a fond dream of the most optimistic and toward this end the societies resolutely worked. Step by step the way became cleared, and eventually, last spring, the deal was made whereby the two-story brick block, known as the Hughes' Block, became the property of the Danabo, the Brotherhood, the auxiliaries, and various members of the lodges.

In local Danish annals April 15, 1900, will long be remembered as the day of the formal dedication of the new property. Nearly a thousand persons were present on the occasion, which was celebrated by speech-making, dancing, and feasting. The lower portion of the block is occupied by the grocery firm of Frank Peterson & Company, while the second floor is fitted up in tasty fashion as lodge rooms and dancing hall. A stage of ample size in the hall permits of its use for entertainments of various kinds.

Will Be Owned by Society.

Although a considerable portion of the stock issued to purchase the new acquisition is owned by members of the various Danish societies, the individual purchaser agrees that the stock will be delivered to the societies at the purchase price upon demand. In this way the half will eventually come into the hands of the societies as a whole. It is further provided that no purchaser can sell his stock to any other person not a member of the Danabo, the Brotherhood, of the two auxiliaries. That no stock is or has been offered for sale since the purchase of the building speaks well for the success of the undertaking. While no figures are given, it is stated upon good authority that the investment has proven a very profitable one for all and the owners were contemplating the building of an additional story to the building in the near future. Should this be done, it is the intention to have the lodge rooms on the third floor and

remodel the entire second floor for a dance hall.

Many Danish Merchants.

With more than ordinary versatility, Danes are found in every branch of mercantile enterprise. It is, however, in work of a mechanical nature that they are at their best. Of the architects and contractors of the city, the large majority are Danes, while in railroad work the same rule applies. For some reason, the grocery business appeals especially to the Danish merchant, no less than thirteen being engaged in this line. *The above article was published March 4, 1906; it was contributed for reprint here by Darlene Vergamini*

PROMISE YOURSELF.....

- To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.
- To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.
- To make all your friends feel that there is something special about them.
- To look at the sunny side of everything.
- To think only of the best, to work only for the best and expect only the best.
- To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.
- To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.
- To wear a cheerful countenance at all things and give every living creature you meet a smile.
- To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.
- To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

- - Contributed by Darlene Vergamini

Trivia Question Answer

In the 1840's the Post Office Department found it cheaper and more efficient to contract with individuals to carry the mail between post offices in many areas of the country than to use postal employees. These routes were designated as "certainly, celerity, and security" routes. Instead of repeating those words for each route, postal clerks soon substituted three asterisks for the words. Because of these asterisks, these routes became known as "star routes".

September Brought Many Rewards for the Sportsman A Century Ago

The waters around Council Bluffs are not black with feathered fowl, nor is the brush alive with furry game but nevertheless to the hunter, who is not too lazy to "hike" a half day at a time, there is game and sport worthy of the effort.

Lake Manawa and the surrounding swamps are the home of native and migratory ducks and marsh birds. Teal, mallard, canvas-back, blue bills, bald pate, pin tail red head, and other species of ducks as well as brant and geese, make this region a stopping place on their annual migrations. Sometimes



the season is short on these birds, but the case is rare and is due to special causes, such as the superabundance of smoke on this side of the river from South Omaha and Omaha or swollen streams of Nebraska offering better feeding grounds. Hundreds of birds are shot nearly every week during the active

season. These birds fatten on the grasshoppers and other insects of the tall grass or new mown stubble. The open season for shooting these birds begins the 1st of September.

The snipe and especially the jack snip variety, make good sport in the marshes.

These birds can best be located by the commotion of the soil because on account of their length of bill they must have a spongy soil of sufficient moisture to enable them to bore deep enough to secure the grubs that provide them with food.

Prairie chickens are numerous north of Council Bluffs and southwest of the city. These birds, however, are very shy and hard to approach.

Perhaps the best sport is to be had in shooting rabbits and as these animals become a pest to the farmer in

eating his fruit trees and other tender shrubs, he welcomes the hunter who can shoot in the right direction enough that stock or hired help will not be maimed or endangered. This fall thirty-six rabbits were counted running from the last row as the grain was being cut.

Ferret merchants who make barter of raising and providing these animals for the purpose of rabbit hunting are numerous.

Quite a number of opossum and raccoons are caught in the hills north of the city. These animals do considerable damage to the crops in the townships

"(The farmer) welcomes the hunter who can shoot in the right direction enough that stock or hired help will not be maimed..."

north of Council Bluffs. Farmers in the region make considerable spending money in killing the animals and furnishing the same to restaurants in the city. 'possums bring \$1 apiece and 'coons a similar figure in the proper season.

While the denizens of Nebraska have been touting their hunting preserves, the sportsmen of this city who have a few hours to spend each

"Farmers in the region make considerable spending money in killing the animals and furnishing the same to restaurants in the city. 'possums bring \$1 apiece and 'coons a similar figure"

week and a working knowledge of the "habitat" of the animals in this vicinity can testify that there is game enough here to be had to make it worth while. Besides the forgetfulness of business hustle there is an appetite forthcoming which can only be appeased by the smell of the cooking game fresh from the cover of the marsh fields.

(Contributed by Darlene Vergamini; published September 6, 1906)

*Historical Society of
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and Board Members*

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Genealogical Committee- Alice Bontz

Newsletter Editor- Dr. Richard Warner

The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County is dedicated to the preservation of books, letters, sites, records, artifacts and buildings of historical significance in the county. The Society operates and is restoring the Historic Squirrel Cage Jail, Rock Island Depot, involved in the efforts to create a local museum, and is active in promoting historical and genealogical research.

Requests for information about Society projects, membership, and volunteer work are welcomed. Write the Historical Society of Pottawattamie County, Post Office Box 2, Council Bluffs, IA, 51502.

The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County Member Newsletter is printed eleven times a year and mailed to all members. The membership mailing list is maintained by the Society Secretary, Robert Hastings. Please direct any address corrections to Mr. Hastings at 322-0612 or to the Society post office box listed above.

Members are always welcome to attend a Board Meeting. Anyone desiring to speak at the meeting should send a letter or call either the Secretary or President to be placed on the agenda.

Historical Society of Pottawattamie County web address: [Http://www.geocities.com/heartland/plains/5660](http://www.geocities.com/heartland/plains/5660)

**Historical
Society**
Of Pottawattamie County

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