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George Hayes Interview

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Oral History 4425 Adairsville Project

George Hayes Interview

Conducted by Sarah Strickland, James Moon, and Jennifer Dickey

Location: San Souci Women's Club, Adairsville, Georgia

October 8, 2018

Transcribed by Sarah Strickland and James Moon

Moon: I am James Moon here with Sarah Strickland. We are interviewing Mr. George Hayes at the San Souci Clubhouse in Adairsville, Georgia on October 8th, 2018. Good afternoon Mr. Hayes, Thank you for meeting with us.

Hayes: Good afternoon [light laughter].

Moon: Would you start out by telling us your name and where you were born?

Hayes: My name is George Hayes Jr., and I grew up in the house that I'm living in now, 105 Park Street, which is just a half a block, a block from San Souci.

Moon: What's your occupation?

Hayes: I'm retired. I spent most of my working life working for the city of Seattle.

Moon: What did you do for the city of Seattle?

Hayes: I was a budget person, a petty bureaucrat.

Strickland: So, the house you grew up in, you said your parents had lived there as well. Did the house exist before they lived there?

Hayes: No, my dad contracted to have the house built with my mother's input, and then in 1939 they started building... As soon as it was built in 1940 they got married, moved into the house and lived there their entire lives. Both of them actually died in the house in their, my dad was ninety, my mother was in her late eighty's.

Strickland: So, were you born in the house?

Hayes: Not born in the house, but born in a hospital in Rome. I mean they took me home to 105 Park Street when I was an infant, so I spent my entire childhood growing up there.

- Moon:** Why did your parents choose Adairsville?
- Hayes:** They both had history. My mother had lived in Adairsville, as well as Shannon _____ [??] and my dad had grown up in _____ [??] in Adairsville, so we have a lot of history in Adairsville.
- Moon:** Does living in the house that you grew up in make you feel a little more connected to Adairsville?
- Hayes:** Well, [George laughs] sure, I mean it's a place that I feel very comfortable in, obviously, so I mean the town's great. The way I ended up here was that, I was married for a second time back ten years ago and my new wife was living in Dallas, Texas, and I talked a lot about Adairsville, and we visited Adairsville and she said, "Wow, this place is pretty cool. You know we could live there." Because I had kept my childhood home, I was renting it out, so we remodeled the house and moved in, and we've been happy.
- Strickland:** So, speaking about remodeling, I know that you have someone who's very famous for a lot of the building that took place in Adairsville. Can you tell us what you know about ...
- Hayes:** John Schmitz?
- Strickland:** Uh huh.
- Hayes:** Well, I mean he was in Adairsville at the turn of the century in 1900, and then for a few years after that. And he was an architect and builder and built a lot of the houses on Park Street, and built Maggie Mae's Tea House, or the 1902 Stock Exchange on the public square. And so, his signature trademark with these houses was all of them would have, in the attic or the second floor, they would have colored glass in the windows. So, if you go around and look for houses in Adairsville that have a second story window that's stained glass, it's in all likelihood it was designed and built by my great-grandfather.
- Dickey:** Didn't he design and build the first schoolhouse in Adairsville?
- Hayes:** I don't believe so. That building was original, and I think it was already there when he moved here.
- Dickey:** Somewhere I read that he built that building right after he got here.

Hayes: Not that I know of. It's possible.

Moon: What can you tell us about some of the structures that you do know of?

Hayes: They were turn of the century houses, Victorian, they had high ceilings. Most of them, well, all of them would have been heated by either coal or wood, so they would have had wood stoves and fireplaces. One of the things that was told to me by my father, it was his grandfather, was that John Schmitz motto or words to live by, he always said if something is worth doing it's worth doing well, and all of his houses are really well built and put together. I still have a desk that he put together, and it's put together with pegs so there are no nails in the desk. It's upstairs in my office now, but it's a solid piece of furniture that I'm very happy to have in my possession.

Strickland: Most definitely. So, are there a lot of the houses still standing in Adairsville, or do you know?

Hayes: Yeah, eight probably. Ten possibly. I think there's information on those houses at the depot museum. And several of them are going to be on the home tour that the San Souci and historical society are putting on in November this year, so if you want to see one of those houses you... The two houses at the top of Park Street were both designed and built by my great-grandfather, so if you would like to go look at those, hopefully you'll have the opportunity.

Moon: In 1917 when your great-grandfather left Adairsville did someone in your family stay behind, or did they come back later?

Hayes: His daughter, who was my grandmother, stayed in Adairsville. She married a Hayes and stayed here, so she'd come down shortly after John Schmitz had at the time, and had looked after him. So yeah, she stayed.

Moon: What was it like growing up in Adairsville?

Hayes: During the fifties it was an idyllic time, at least for us. The San Souci was the lending library in town at the time, and from as early as I can remember, which would have been four I think, I would come down here to the library, I mean it's a half a block from my house, and Miss Topsy [Alice Howard] was the librarian and I would sit on her lap and she would read to me, I mean way before I could read myself. So those are my earliest memories.

And the public square downtown looks to me, I mean, very, very similar to the way it was when I was growing up. I mean the buildings that are standing there now date from the turn of the century, and so they were all there when I was growing up. I was born in 1946. So, the early fifties there were three mom and pop grocery stores in the public square, and growing up my mother would tell me quite often to run to the store and pick up a loaf of bread or a gallon of milk or a pack of flour, whatever it was that she needed. Of course, the shopkeepers knew me, and they would just write down the charge so I never had to take any money and pay for anything. They kept it on a book there, and my parents would settle up at the end of the month. So that was a very, very fun time to grow up.

Strickland: Sounds like it. Can you tell us anything else about Miss Topsy, other than she worked at the library?

Hayes: [George laughs] Miss Topsy was the town historian and she wrote for the newspapers around, and she wrote the first account of the Great Locomotive Chase that shows up in the _____[??], which is the newspaper that comes out every year. The same time the Great Locomotive Chase Festival happens. So, she was a historian, she was a poet. She published a couple of books. She was very literate. She had been a teacher for a while. That was before I was in school. But mostly Miss Topsy was my close friend, and I stayed close with her until she died, and she lived to be in her nineties. She would tell stories about things that had happened to her growing up. She talked about her house where she grew up, which is northwest side of what's now the elementary school, [??] elementary school, but that's where the old school was that I attended.

And that house, she was growing up, it was during the Depression, and she talked about how people would come to the back door, because they knew that there was always food available. I mean there were certain houses in all the small towns everywhere where hobos or people travelling would be able to go and get something to eat, because things were very tough. My dad had left Adairsville after he graduated from high school, and spent a year at Berry College. He had gone to Florida and was part owner of an orange grove, and he would talk about driving a truckload of citrus to New York City and then coming back with an empty truck, and how by the time he got back to Adairsville it would be full of people or hobos that were trying to go to Florida to work. Just like the migrant workers went to California or Oklahoma and the Midwest.

Strickland: So, did your father move out of Adairsville, is that right?

Hayes: He did. My grandmother, his mother, was still living here. He lived in Florida for a number of years, and made enough money to be able to build the house on Park Street, which was his goal, and he wanted to marry my mother, and so that's exactly what he did. He made enough money to actually build a house, and they moved in in 1940, as soon as they were married.

Moon: Besides coming to the library, what did you do for fun?

Hayes: One of the things that we did, we would ride our bicycles all over town. A few times we road our bicycles out to Barnsley Gardens, which at that time was just a ruin, and it was overgrown. The rumor was that it was a haunted house. [George laughs] There were ghost there. Of course, there was a murder there and you'll find out all about that when you're talking to Mr. Coker [Clent].

The other thing, my mother was a Cub Scout leader, and so I was in the Cub Scouts, and when I grew a little older, I became a Boy Scout, and we would go up once a month and have a campout at High Lonesome, the top of Boyd Mountain. Chief Willis Boyd was my Scout Master, and at that time, in the late fifties and early sixties he was proud of the fact that he was the oldest living, active Scout Master in the United States. He was in his eighties to late eighties at that time. My father had been a Scout with the chief as well, and my dad was the first Eagle Scout in Chief's troop, troop twelve. Then towards, well forty years later I became Chief's last Eagle Scout. We would walk up Boyd Mountain. It was a dirt road at that time. It wasn't paved. And sometimes we'd meet Chief at his house, at High Lonesome. The chief was a pianist, among other things. He was an educator and a schoolteacher, and he had a baby grand piano in his house at High Lonesome, and I distinctly remember him playing "Moonlight Sonata." My mother was also a pianist so they were good friends. Of course, my dad idolized Chief, and so did I. I mean Chief was a moral force. He was one of the most moral people that I have ever known. He fought in World War I, and he would talk about how disappointed he was that the United States did not end up joining the League of Nations at the end of World War I. That war, to Chief's generation, was the war to end all wars. That was gonna be the last one, so he was disappointed for the rest of his life that it had not been the war to end all wars.

Moon: Did you play fox and hounds up on Boyd Mountain?

Hayes: [George laughs] We would run around. There was a ... Yes we would play fox and hounds. The hounds would be chasing the foxes. Whenever the person that was a fox was caught then that person would turn into a hound,

and so you would play the game until there was only one fox left and everybody else was a hound. Eventually we would catch the fox.

Strickland: So can you tell us what all actually goes into becoming an Eagle Scout, at least when you did it?

Hayes: Well, a person has to earn twenty-one merit badges. A merit badge is awarded when you've taken a test in a particular subject matter or area of skill, and when you pass that test then you're awarded a badge, which is a cloth badge, which is put on a sash, and when you have twenty-one of those, then you're awarded an Eagle Scout badge. The merit badges are for such things as lifesaving, citizenship, and history, and camping skills like fire building and ability to pitch tents. It's something that, Eagle Scouts are proud and often put that on their resumé, and it follows them around for the rest of their life. It's an honor and something that people are proud to have and to be.

Moon: Which was the most difficult to earn, which badge?

Hayes: [George laughs] I was lucky because my father, who was an Eagle Scout, was one of the people that would give the test, so he would help me as I was learning the skills necessary. Probably, the most difficult for me was the fire building and the actual woodcraft skills. I think that was because, one of the things about Chief was as wonderful a person as he was, and as a great Scout leader he was, and as I said he was a moral person and he instructed us in, particularly in, the Scout pledge and things like to do your duty to God and your country. But at least by the time I knew him, he was not as big on the Scout crafting, so he wouldn't spend much time teaching us how to tie knots, or how to build fires. He ended up instructing us in how to live life and how to be good human beings, which has stayed with all of his Scouts, I believe, certainly with me.

Strickland: Do you think that might be because of his views on the war not ending all wars, he wanted to make sure, at least the kids he was in charge of grew up good?

Hayes: Certainly, certainly it was. Whenever he would speak of the world war he wouldn't talk about the actual battles, nor would he talk about the millions of people that were killed in the war. That's not something that he dwelled on or talked about, and those were not the lessons that he thought humanity should learn from the Great War.

Moon: What would you say is the most important thing that he taught you?

Hayes: Respect for other human beings, for humanity in general. It started with his approach, and I mean he loved his Scouts, he was proud of his Scouts and wanted them to honor their parents and people, their neighbors.

Strickland: Are you still friends with any of the Scouts in Adairsville?

Hayes: I am still friends with Chief's grand-nephew, who lives at High Lonesome, and is in Chief's house, so I'm still friends with him. He was a Scout at the same time that I was, Jimmy Boyd.

Moon: You mentioned that people would put Eagle Scout on their resumes and things. Did being an Eagle Scout ever open any opportunities for you?

Hayes: I'm sure that it didn't hurt. I'm not aware of any specific job or anything that I got specifically because I was an Eagle Scout, but people take that into account and it's a positive thing. It takes discipline and it shows that you've been able to follow through with tasks, that you were _____[??] as a youth growing up.

Moon: What is it about troop twelve, and Adairsville in general, that produced so many Eagle Scouts, what do you think the key to that was?

Hayes: I don't think there were quite as many [George laughs] as legend had it. But that was a tribute to Chief, certainly, he was encouraging all his Scouts to go as far as they could. There's levels on the way up to becoming an Eagle Scout, so people can end up getting five merit badges or ten merit badges, and even if they don't get the twenty-one that is necessary to become an Eagle Scout, they've still learned a lot of skills and Chief was always pushing the Scouts to do that.

Moon: Sounds like he had a real impact on the community as a whole.

Hayes: He did. Chief was the, for years and years, was the organist at the Adairsville Methodist Church, and the pipe organ that they had there when he was the organist was manually operated, and so there were bellows that somebody had to push to build up the pressure that would enable him to play the organ. And that's one of the things that my dad would do. It would take a couple of them would be manning the bellows for the organ. And then after Chief retired from being the organist and the pianist at the church my mother took over, and she was the organist for years and years, and pianist. The Methodist church is still there at the end of the main square.

Chief was a factor in my growing up in all sorts of ways, and as I mentioned he would play Moonlight Sonata and other classical music in his house in High Lonesome at the top of Boyd Mountain. And his love of classical music was something he shared with all of his Scouts and with me and with my mother and my dad. Certainly that was a real, one of the reasons that my mother played the piano her entire life.

Dickey: You mentioned the Methodist Church, is that church where, that you went to as a child?

Hayes: Yes

Dickey: Are you still a member?

Hayes: I am, I'm still a member [George laughs] because unless you consciously move your membership I believe that you are for the rest, for the rest of your life [continues laughing]. Yes, I'm still on the roll.

Moon: What can you tell us about being a child and going to the Methodist Church? Any activities or...

Hayes: Not much. We had vacation bible school every, uh every summer. That was something that we did as a matter of course we went to church. On Sunday morning we would go to Sunday school. It started at ten and eleven o'clock we would have the main service, the sermon. So Saturday nights, that was the night we had the Boy Scout camp-outs on Boyd Mountain. So every Sunday morning after we'd been camping we would walk down the mountain and have to get ready and go to church because, certainly there were no excuses about, no thought of not, not attending church.

Strickland: I don't think the Chief would have let you stay home. He might have went and got you maybe.

Hayes: [George laughs] Yes, he might have. Of course he would come down the mountain and be there as well. I know for years the bell in the bell tower of the Methodist Church had not been rung. And it's because they were worried about the stability of the bell. And the church dates from the 1880's I believe. But the one thing that he wanted to do was at his funeral was to have the bell rung, and it was. Chief went to Columbia in New York and received his master's degree, and he was a very literate person. One of the things that he wanted to have read at his funeral was "Ask Not for Whom the Bell Tolls." Of course, John Danne's Poem.

- Strickland:** You mentioned that he was educated. Did he teach in Adairsville?
- Hayes:** He did. He was a history teacher as I recall. That was before I started school. As I said, by the time I was in middle school and early high school he was already in his late eighties so he had retired.
- Moon:** Would you care to expand a little bit on your time in school?
- Hayes:** There were twenty-six people in my graduating class. There were a few more of us when we started in the first grade. But we started in the first grade in the same building, or the same attached building and spent twelve years there, along with the same people. And there was no kindergarten. By the time I graduated I think there were 700 people in the entire school. There's a picture of the entire group, from sixty-four which was when I graduated. I thought the school was really good. I had the same English teacher, Mrs. Witherington, for all four years, and the same math teacher, largely, who was Marion Lacey, the founder of the Great Locomotive Chase Festival. It was quite possible to get a very good education even though the school was as small as it was. We only had a few teachers. I did not consider myself, nor did anybody I graduated with, we did not consider ourselves at any disadvantage whatsoever. Having attended Adairsville High School and grammar school, elementary school. We thought it was an advantage. Of course, there was such a small number of people in our classes that we had the same teachers year after year they got to know us very well, and they knew what our strengths and our weaknesses was, and was able to build on those.
- Strickland:** Almost like having a personal tutor.
- Hayes:** It was quite a bit like that.
- Moon:** Did you do any extra-curricular activities at school?
- Hayes:** When I was growing up and the small number of people that were in high school. All of us that played sports played every sport. We started off in the school year, we would start off at football season, and then as soon as football season was over, we'd pick up the basketball and start playing basketball. And the first year that I was in high school, in the ninth grade we had a baseball team, and so we would pick up our baseball gloves as soon as basketball season was over. But baseball cost money and the school decided that it would be better served to have track and field team rather than have a baseball field. They didn't have to pay for the gloves and bats, and baseballs. So the last three years I would put down the basketball and put on my track shoes, and start running track. And because

we were a small school, we were a part of the lowest classification in the state of Georgia, class C at the time. _____[??] classes A's and B's and C's the smallest schools. So that meant there wasn't a great deal of, I mean there weren't thousands of people that we were competing against of the other students, so they were able to have success, at least in that limited small area, that small pond.

Moon: What position did you play on the football team?

Hayes: I was the quarterback. And I was point guard, [George laughs] and I was a half-miler. So, I said we had some success. I actually won the state track meet, so I was the state champion in the half-mile. Which we ran a half-mile instead of the eight-eighty back in those days... The other thing was, being a small high school, we got to do everything; anything we wanted to do. If I wanted to, I could have been in the band. But I [George laughs] was playing sports instead. I was on the debate team, and I was, there was something called declamation at the time where someone stood up, declaimed gave a canned speech... It was a great time to go to school.

Moon: Did sports help you get into college?

Hayes: It did. I went to Stetson University on a basketball scholarship. So, it did. As I said, most of our parents in Adairsville, nobody or virtual nobody had very much money. So those of us that went to college we got scholarships. They were academic scholarships or sport scholarships. We had to pretty much find a way to pay the tuition ourselves. But there was never a question in my family that I was going to college. That was a given. I had an older sister that she was four years older and she went to college, and then my younger sister she went to college, and so that's what we did.

Strickland: Had your parents gone to college?

Hayes: My mother went to college and it was during the Depression, and she went for two years to Maryville College. At that time, she was able to get a job as a schoolteacher with only two years of college. And after I graduated from high school, she went back to school and went back to Shorter College in Rome and picked up her degree. My dad had gone for a year in Berry College, which was free tuition at the time. He only stayed for one year because he wanted to go out and make enough money so he could build a house and marry my mom. They had grown up in the same town, so they were childhood sweethearts.

Dickey: When you left here to go to college did you ever have it in your mind that you would end up back in Adairsville? Or did you think...

Hayes: No, I never thought I'd come back to Adairsville. But I could not bare to get rid of the house my parents had built, lived in and died in. So, I kept the house with no intention of ever moving back there, but I just kept it for sentimental reasons. I was actually renting it out to some people when I brought my newly married wife to Adairsville. She had fallen in love with the town, and we moved here.

Moon: How long ago was that?

Hayes: It was nine years ago.

Dickey: It was a small town when you were growing up here. Do you remember what the population was left roughly?

Hayes: Yeah, it was right at 1,000 people.

Dickey: 1,000 people. So, when you came back, were there people still here who you had known growing up?

Hayes: Sure. Half the town was acquaintances of mine. People knew me that I frankly didn't remember. Of course, my parents lived their entire lives here. I'm George Hayes Jr., and so my dad is known by everybody in town, and my mom.

Moon: Did you guys have a reunion recently?

Hayes: We did. It would have been the fiftieth reunion. So, I guess that would have been 2014. I guess that was four years ago.

Strickland: Do you know how many, well obviously you do, how many people were at the reunion?

Hayes: Probably, maybe you can talk to Linda Bass, she was one of the organizers. She could give far more information about how many were actually there. She would be more precise. But a lot. I mean a good percentage of the twenty-six people that had graduated.

Moon: Did you come back to Adairsville after you graduated college?

Hayes: I actually did come back for one year right after college, and I taught at the high school, well not at the high school, I taught in the middle school. Sixth and seventh grades. At the time we were basically teaching all of the subjects, or most of the subjects. We would have one class and teach

everything. So, I still have students around, and at that time my mother was a second grade teacher, and so she was teaching at the same time that I was. So, there's still quite a few people that were in her grade, in her second grade, and she was certainly a much more memorable teacher than I was. Numerous people have told me she was their favorite teacher in school growing up.

Moon: Before you went off to college, what did you guys as teenagers? What did you do for fun?

Hayes: We played sports and we rode our bicycles. We went camping, we were Boy Scouts. Growing up my parents were bridge players and, mostly bridge players, we would play cards, play bridge. One of the Methodist preachers that was here when I was growing up would come over, it seemed like almost on a daily basis, and play cards with my mother, because my dad was working at Celanese which is a textile mill that was in Rome, and they would do shift work. So, you would work three different shifts. Over a period of time, he'd work a week working the early morning shift, which would start at seven o'clock in the morning, I believe, and then there would be the afternoon shift, which would be the next week he would work, and then there would be the graveyard shift, which he would work at night. So, a lot of the time he was off working. He would either show up late after the afternoon shift or he would show up early in the morning after the graveyard shift.

Moon: Did you ever gather at the Square with the other teenage guys?

Hayes: Not that I recall. We would play baseball in the lot that was just west of where I am sitting right now. There was a vacant lot. That was a place that we used for playing ball.

Dickey: So, when you were in school, the school system was segregated. Do you remember very much about race relations during your childhood in Adairsville?

Hayes: Sadly no. The town was very segregated, as the school was totally segregated, and we had virtually no contact with any African- Americans at all. In those terms, until I was in high school, I was oblivious, and the period I was in high school things started happening. People started protesting, and so I became conscious of what was going on in our society, but gosh I mean the Brown vs. Education in 1955 had no effect upon me, and we didn't even know that it happened. Georgia didn't get around to implementing it until actually the year after I graduated from high school. There were no African- Americans that attended Adairsville High School

the entire time I was there, the early sixties. So I didn't have any classmates until I went off to college.

Strickland: Was there protesting in Adairsville? Do you remember?

Hayes: Was there what?

Strickland: Was there any protesting that happened in Adairsville?

Hayes: Not that I'm conscious of.

Dickey: So then when you came back after college and taught for a year the school was integrated at that point?

Hayes: It was partially integrated. I don't remember having any African American students in my grade. And they may have, gosh I don't know, you'll have to talk to Linda Bass about that as well because she was a teacher. She and her husband Kenny started teaching right after they graduated from college and taught here their entire lives; working lives. They're obviously still alive.

Dickey: Do you guys have any final questions?

Strickland: Do you have anything else that you would like to mention? Can you think of anything?

Hayes: My grandfather, who was my mother's father, Hogan, had run a store for a while on the public square, but the other thing he had done; he had worked for the railroad. He was a telegraph operator. If you go to the depot museum, you'll see the desk where telegraph operator, the station master sat; where the telegraph was. Of course, the people would send telegrams messages telling him when the next train was coming by and how big a train it was, and tell him to get ready because at that time they would stop, but not always stop, so if had to find out whether or not there were any passengers, because there was passengers as well as free trains running. When he was the telegraph operator the story is, I always heard growing up was there is a code, a special code for every station along the railroad line, so every telegraph operator, there was a certain code that would start off each telegraph message that was directed to him, or it was directed to the Adairsville Depot, and if it was going to the Resaca Depot, Chattanooga Depot then it would start off with a different code; and the story was always that my grandfather would sleep until he heard the code, and whenever his code came on he would immediately awake and answer the telegraph as to what they wanted to know.

Dickey: So, he had conditioned himself to recognize that...

Hayes: That code would wake him up.

Moon: Did you ever take any trips on the train from the depot?

Hayes: I did not. By the time I was growing up, the passenger service was not quite finished until the early sixties I believe. It was the last passenger train that ran through here. We were part of the generation that grew up with the automobile, and it was part of "See the USA in your Chevrolet," it was that kind of story. We would, every summer, the five of us, my mom and my dad and two sisters, would take off for vacation and drive cross-country much of the time. So we drove across to California a couple of times, drove to Florida, drove to New York, drove to Canada and that was part of my growing up.

Moon: How would you describe Adairsville to a complete stranger?

Hayes: [George laughs] It was like Mayberry. It was like growing up with Sheriff Taylor or Andy Griffith. It was. We only had a couple of police officers who we seldom saw, and I thought it was routine. I thought life was like "Father Knows Best" and "Leave it to Beaver" and "The Andy Griffith Show." That's the way it was.

Dickey: Were you shocked when you left Adairsville and got out there in the world?

Hayes: [Laughs] Uh, no. No, not at all. As much of a small town as it was, it was not provincial in terms of the education with Chief, with my parents, with Topsy; they were, all of those people were very, very literate people, and very well read, and very politically aware and savvy. Most of the people of my parents' generation were Roosevelt Democrats and the biggest shock to me was after I had grown up and gone to college and was coming back finding out that a great percentage of the population suddenly become Republican while I wasn't paying attention.

Dickey: Anything else?

Moon: I think that will do it. Thank you very much.

Hayes: Thank you, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed recollecting the past.

Dickey: Thank you so much.

Hayes: My pleasure. Certainly.

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