



# THE HISTORICAL TIMES

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Architect Frank Packard's watercolor of the proposed new Granville Inn.

## Granville Inn emerged during village's 'million dollar year'

### Automobile's arrival helps spark J.S. Jones' venture

By JAMES G. HALE

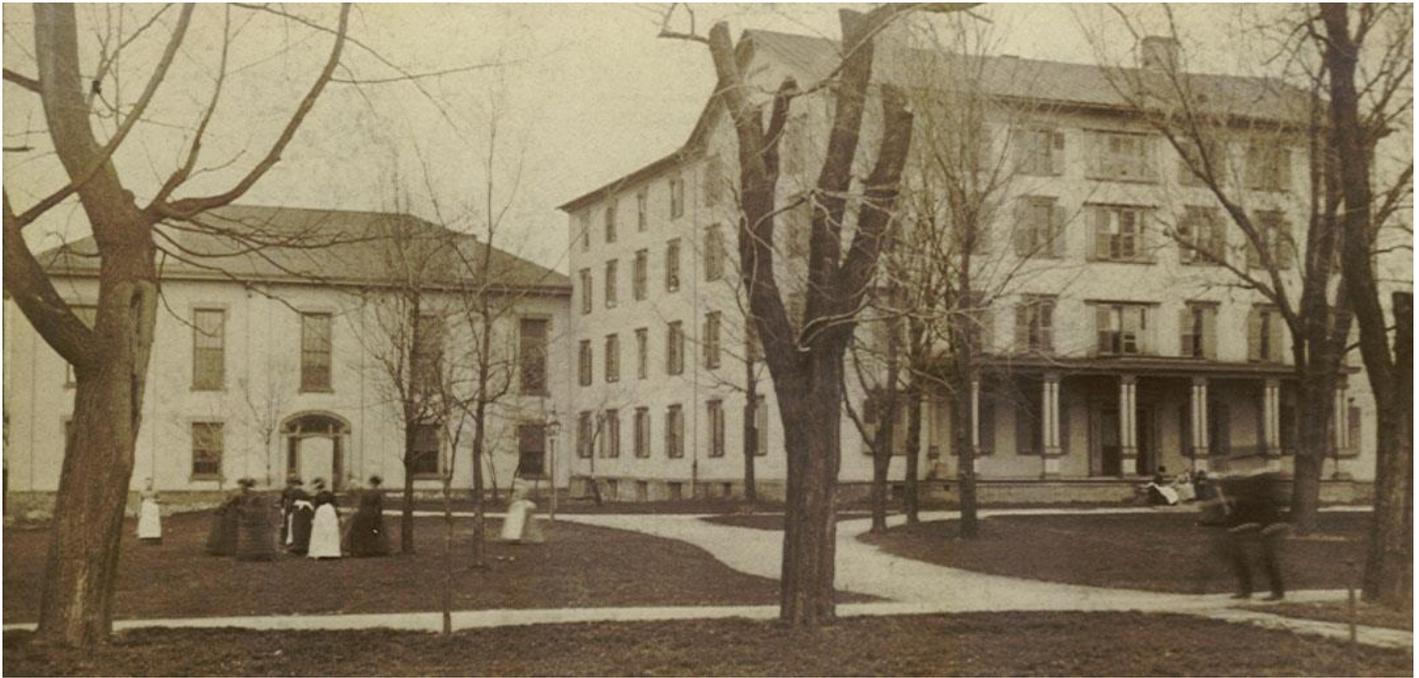
"A Million Dollar Year," declared the *Granville Times* headline, looking back at 1924. It had been a pinnacle of development in Granville, which only three years earlier introduced electricity into village homes, and five years before that installed the town's first sewer system and began paving its notoriously muddy village streets.

Civic pride and many construction projects followed on the heels of these improvements, and 1924 brought "some of the greatest strides in progress ever accomplished in any year since the

founding of the village," according to the *Times*.

On the south side of East Broadway, two new brick structures rose in tandem to flank the commercial block: The Ohio Baptist Convention to the east (now the Village offices) and the Peoples State Bank to the west (now Park National). One block to the east, Clara Sinnett White's frame house was moved to a new foundation at the rear of the property to make room on the streetscape for the new Granville Public Library, designed by prominent architect Frank Packard.

A new high school was also erected that year (to



**The Granville Female College occupied the property on which The Granville Inn was eventually built.**

be demolished in 1997) on Granger Street between East Broadway and College. At the same time, Denison was beginning construction on the first two dormitories on the East quad (Sawyer and Beaver), having just completed the men's basketball gym on West College (known as the Wigwam) and the iconic Swasey chapel.

The noise and rubble of so many active building sites would have had a visible impact on the village in 1924, but no project was as transforming to the appearance and spirit of Granville as John Sutphin Jones' Granville Inn and Golf Course.

J.S. Jones's life was a Horatio Alger story during the era when that was the model for every ambitious young man in America. The son of coal mining Welsh immigrants in southern Ohio, an early career in the railroad business brought him to Granville where he met and married in 1884 the well-to-do Sarah Follett, who lived with her parents in Monomoy Place. His dealings in railroads and then coalmines eventually earned him substantial wealth, allowing Jones to indulge his appetite for property and fine things through the first quarter of the new century.

### **J.S. Jones acquires Inn site in '08**

In 1908, while still in the midst of creating Bryn Du, his sizeable estate east of the village, Jones purchased the land across the street from the Buxton Inn on East Broadway, which had served for 60 years as the campus of The Granville Female College, alma mater of

his wife Sarah. Frank Packard, the architect who worked with Jones to design Bryn Du and later the Public Library, returned in 1922 to begin creating Jones' vision of an elegant and picturesque inn on this land, in the style of an English country manor house. Packard's blueprints from that year name the project "Ye Purple Pig Tavern," no doubt poking fun with Jones at their British affectations.

The idea of creating of an inn was closely tied to the



**OPENING RECEPTION  
BUFFET SUPPER**

Hors d'Oeuvres Moscovite  
Consomme Madrilene in Jelly

Kennebeck Salmon Norvegienne  
Mayonnaise Sauce-Cucumber Salad  
Lobster a la Parisienne

Boned Capon Granville Inn  
Beef Tongue a l'Escarlate  
Chicken Patties "Sallie"  
Cotelette d'Agneau en Chaud Froid  
Virginia and York Ham en Bellevue  
Vermont Turkey a la Gelee  
Salad Russe en Aspic  
Prime Ribs of Beef  
Mayonnaise of Chicken  
Lobster Salad Melborne  
Potato and  
Fruit Salads

Orange Sherbet  
Vanilla Ice Cream Bryn Du Farm  
Petits Fours

Iced Tea, Coffee  
Fruit Punch

GRANVILLE INN  
Granville, Ohio

Thursday, June 26, 1924  
From 4 p.m. till 8 p.m.

*Dancing and a la Carte service from 9 p.m. till 12 o'clock*

# GRANVILLE INN

RATES PER DAY, WEEK OR MONTH ON BEDROOMS WITH BATH

Single Room per day.....	\$ 4.00- 5.00
"    "    " week.....	\$ 26.00- 32.00
"    "    " month.....	\$100.00-120.00
Double "    " day.....	\$ 7.00- 9.00
"    "    " week.....	\$ 45.00- 56.00
"    "    " month.....	\$120.00-160.00

Private Parlor \$8.00 per day extra.

Although miniscule by today's standards, the cost of a Granville Inn room when it first opened was still regarded as "the most costly small hotel of any place in the world."

proliferation of automobiles and paved roads in the 1910s and early 1920s. A new market of well-heeled day-trippers and tourists in motorcars were looking for lodging and diversion, and Jones wanted his adopted Ohio village to be a showplace.

An early promotional pamphlet for the inn and golf course includes a fold-out map showing all major roads between Chicago and New York leading to Granville Ohio, with descriptions to tempt "the traveling and pleasure seeking public ...those who know and appreciate service of the highest type," playing up Granville's "ancestral" trees, electric lighting, "splendid waterworks [i.e. indoor plumbing], and well-paved streets." The west wing of the inn, built on the foundation of the Female College's gymnasium and classroom building, Kerr Hall, was designed with a walled courtyard for parking motorcars, and a three-bay garage for indoor storage and care of guests' vehicles — it was said to hold as many as 8 to 10 Model Ts.

As Packard began designing the Granville Inn, Jones also hired the preeminent Scottish designer Donald Ross to transform the 200 westernmost acres of his estate, Bryn Du, into a first rate golf course. The two projects were nearly adjacent and shared the common purpose of providing an elegant destination for motorists, while also raising the tone of the community to the tastes of its leading citizen.

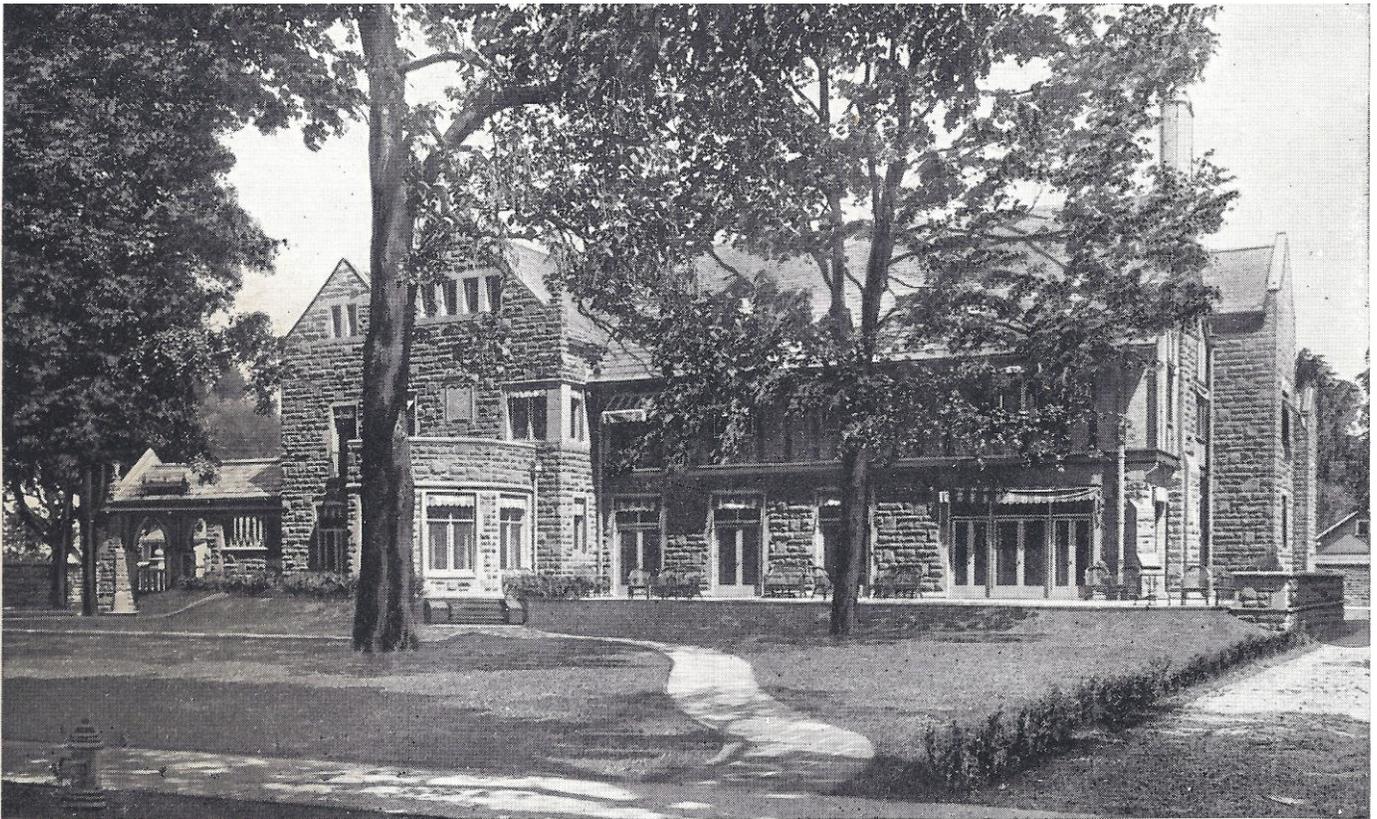
An estimated 5,000 guests attended the opening reception of the Granville Inn on June 26, 1924. Facilities included 24 sleeping rooms; an oak-paneled "great hall" lobby with sofas, easy chairs, and a long

library table for reading; an "unroofed piazza" to the back with a fountain, where guests danced under the stars to Gregg's orchestra of Columbus. Downstairs offered gentlemen two smoking rooms, a billiard room, and a bar, whatever that word implied five years into Prohibition. Altogether *spiffing*. The buffet menu that evening included Lobster *a la Parisienne* and vanilla ice cream from Jones's Bryn Du Farm.

### "Dizzying" price tags

The building's cost was judged to be in the dizzying range of \$600,000, and the golf course was an additional \$200,000. Acknowledging its own extravagance, the inn's brochure describes itself as "an enterprise based on civic pride without consideration of immediate profit." The year after its opening, Editor John Willy of *The Hotel Monthly* magazine was lured from Chicago by the inn's reputation for charm and comfort — he wrote a lengthy article that began, "The village of Granville, in Licking County, Ohio, is noted for having the most costly small hotel of any place in America, if not in the world."

The inn's high standards rested on the able shoulders of its German-born manager, Max Mehlborn and his Scottish wife Annie, who served as clerk. Mehlborn hired other German staff including Paul, the chef, and waiters like Otto Hauf, who epitomized the general atmosphere of meticulous old world service, responding to guests with a heavily accented "very good," and at least an implied click of the heels. Over nearly 30 years, Hauf discreetly served both local citizens and visiting titans of industry, including Henry



Granville Inn, Granville, Ohio

105156

**On a 1940s postcard, The Granville Inn looked much the same as it did when it was first built.**

Ford. In a 1951 interview Hauf recalled “that great lawyer, Clarence Darrow,” as well as “the day all of the governors of the United States, except two or three, came here for lunch and a day of business. This was the greatest day of the inn.”

Mehlborn’s nephew James Young, a graduate of Denison University in 1930, took over management of the inn from 1932 to 1951, and his son Chuck Young, who still lives in Granville, grew up surrounded by the inn and its staff, sporting dark green uniforms with crisp white striping. As a boy, Chuck was allowed (“with supervision”) to operate the inn’s plugboard phone system, dialing outside lines for the guest rooms. He remembers meeting lodgers like Admiral “Bull” Halsey and British actor Charles Laughton, who in 1949 came to the front desk looking for a shoeshine. Young was 11 at the time and took the actor’s large shoes, watching him pad off to the dining room in his stocking feet.

### **Sallie takes over in 1927**

When John Sutphin Jones died in 1927, ownership of the inn passed to his first daughter, Sallie Jones Sexton, a horsewoman and noteworthy character, but generally acknowledged not to have inherited her father’s gift for finance. The inn received its first

significant facelift in the early 1950s: the laundry and staff housing over the garage were converted into guest rooms, expanding the original 24 rooms and suites to 33. All the rooms were redecorated, as was the lobby. The main dining room at the back of the building, which started as an “unroofed piazza,” was rebuilt in 1954 and named “The Peacock Room” after two large murals. The kitchen was completely refurbished. The Granville Inn and golf course continued to be known as a place of charm and history, but times were changing, and a high-toned inn in central Ohio needed to adapt. By the early 1970s, articles about lawsuits for unpaid services started to surface, guest rooms closed and then the restaurant, and it was clear the business was in trouble.

Seriously hobbled by bills, Sallie Jones Sexton lost the Granville Inn and her beloved Bryn Du farm — the inn was sold in a 1976 sheriff’s sale to Paul Kent and his son, Robert for \$190,000. The village of Granville had just voted to allow the sale of alcohol at this time, so in addition to converting the former oak-paneled lobby into a dining room, the Kents created a tavern in what had been a small sunroom behind the dining room, making the inn a more attractive business venture and providing a popular gathering place in the decades since.

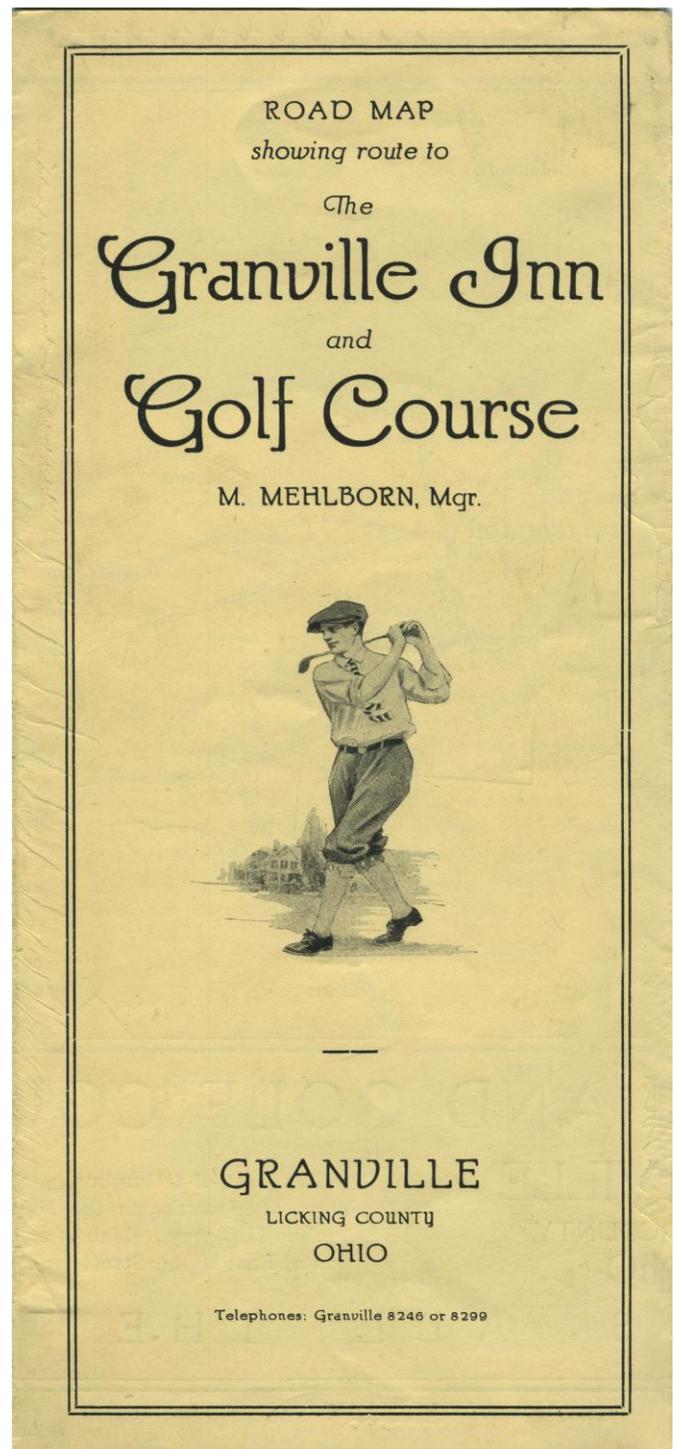
In 2003, the Kent family sold the inn to Granville Hospitality, a group of local investors who announced having “no big changes in store for the inn in the short term.” Operations continued as usual, with some imaginative experiments like Murder Mystery Dinners and wine tastings, but the recession was unkind to business and the facilities were sinking under decades of deferred maintenance. In 2011, the lending bank foreclosed on the inn, citing a \$1.7 million debt.

It was clear the *grande dame* of Granville needed more than a new gown, she needed a suitor of means, and for the next two years, she waited patiently as service continued and carpeting grew more threadbare. Denison kept its eye on the process, knowing the inn’s value to the university as well as the town. A stimulus to the local economy and setting for countless occasions, it was also a uniquely fine place to lodge and entertain visiting guests, from Robert Frost to Leontyne Price — lecturers, candidates, prospective students, parents of students, and of course alumni have all found it a significant part of their experience of coming to Granville and to Denison.

### University steps in

With all of this in mind, Denison’s trustees together with Seth Patton, Denison’s vice president for finance and management, researched the building and the business and saw an opportunity to do the right thing for the college and the town. Convinced that the inn can be run as a “vital and successful business,” Denison stepped in and purchased the Granville Inn for \$1.5 million in September 2013, closing its doors the following August for a nine-month, \$9 million renovation (federal and state historic restoration tax credits will offset that cost by \$2.6 million). With a plan to retain the character of the historic inn but to bring its infrastructure and functionality into a new century, every square inch has been painstakingly refreshed from top to bottom.

Former rough attic space on the third floor has been converted into 9 new bedrooms and suites with bathrooms, bringing the total number of guest rooms to 39. Bathrooms and kitchen are completely renewed, as are all of the building’s systems from wiring to wireless to HVAC. An elevator was added, the carriage house where Model Ts once parked is now a dining space for catered events including outdoor tables. To meet the realities of customer preferences and profitability, the former pub and dining room spaces have traded spaces, making the large oak-paneled



“great hall,” originally the lobby, into a tavern. Friends of the inn will be reassured to find the characteristic details they associate with the original architecture have been preserved, in particular the oak woodwork and leaded-glass windows.

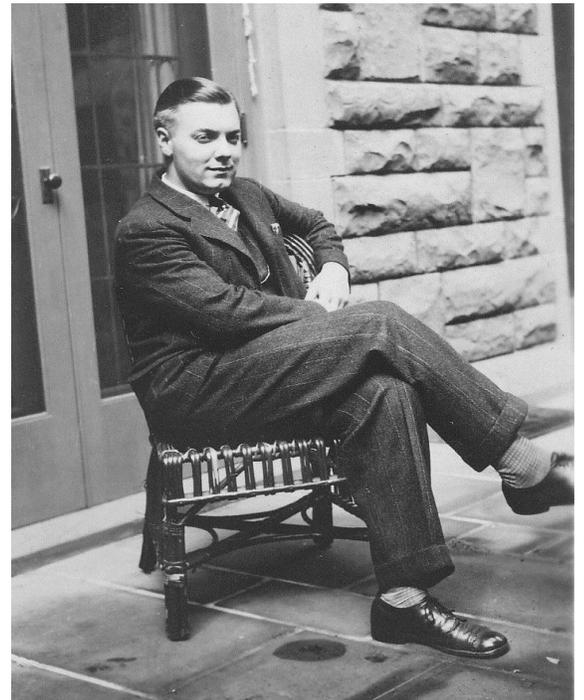
Almost as if J.S. Jones were still keeping his hand in Granville affairs, the shareholders of the Granville Golf Course, including former inn owner Robert Kent, approached Denison last year offering the course as a gift to the college. Trustees voted to accept the gift in October 2014, just as renovations to the inn were getting underway. After some sprucing-up, the renamed Denison Golf Course at Granville opened for



**LEFT: Prior to becoming the Oak Room, which accommodated fine dining, the front section of the inn was a lobby.**

**BELOW, LEFT: The inn's rooms contributed to the hotel's reputation for high standards.**

**BELOW: James Young, a Denison graduate, managed the inn from 1932 to 1951.**



business in April, while work on the inn continued, and was ready for guests by May. Ninety-one years after Jones' visionary gift to the community he loved and improved, ownership of his elegant destinations is again in the hands of a single, able steward.

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 James G. Hale is a member of the Granville Historical Society Publications Committee. After earning a B.A. in English and studio art from Denison he went to Time, Inc.

as a photography researcher for *Time*, *Life*, *People* and *Fortune* magazines. He illustrated his first children's book for HarperCollins in 1990 and began working for Denison in 2008. His responsibilities include photography and magazine editing, and he is a contributing writer for both the *Denison* magazine and TheDEN. Last year, one of his stories won a national CASE gold award for Best Article of the Year. Portions of this article appeared in the *Denison* magazine earlier this year.



**ABOVE:** When a canopy was added, the front patio became a popular dining spot for the inn.



**LEFT:** Once known as the Peacock Room, the large dining area in the rear of the inn became the Great Hall, and is now the Denison Room.

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## **GET CONNECTED, JOIN THE SOCIETY**

The Granville Historical Society is an all-volunteer, non-governmental not-for-profit 501©3 organization with membership open to all. Joining the Society is a delightful way to meet with people who share a love of, or at least an interest in, Granville's rich, well-documented history. Monthly programs, quarterly publications, and a museum that is open five days a week during the season are some of the ways that enable Society volunteers to share facets of what makes Granville so fascinating with members and guests. Volunteers are welcome in the Archives and Museum Collections areas, as well as museum hosts.

Please visit [Granvillehistory.org](http://Granvillehistory.org) for further information about all that we do and how you can get involved.

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