GRAHAM STREET PRIMARY
1889-1989
Staff and students, 1989.
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PRIMARY
1889-1989

Sue Hodges
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Foreword by Beverley Lewis

It is a privilege and a responsibility to be Principal of a school in its centenary year - there is so much planning, and it is important that everyone gets to know about it so that those who want to meet up with old friends manage to do so.

But it is also fascinating. Almost daily I receive phone calls from ex-students and their memories are so interesting that I would happily listen all day - if it wasn’t for the thousand emergencies that arise even with 120 children.

Some remember the school with affection; some still have traumas; some remember wonderful teachers and lots of fun; some remember sadistic teachers and “wagging”. But the great majority always speak with pride of “Graham Street”.

That is why we are proud this year to have the Graham Street name officially returned to our school. We are now Graham Street Primary rather than Port Melbourne Primary - Graham Street. Please don’t mix us up with Nott Street!

We are also proud to have our lovely new red and blue school uniform, and to have the $500,000 upgrade which will make our school so bright and clean, and should be finished around October.

What a lovely way to go into our second hundred years!

BEVERLEY LEWIS
PRINCIPAL
AUGUST 1989
Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many current and former staff and students who contributed time and information to this publication. Special thanks are due to Arthur and Gary Frost, Heather and Colin Whale, Ron Darlington and Lorraine Siska for participating in interviews.

This book is dedicated to Diane Bunnett, Alain Marc and Suzanne O’Callaghan with thanks for their friendships over the years.

Early Port Melbourne

Port Melbourne is one of Melbourne’s oldest areas. By 1854 it had become known as the “back door of Melbourne”. Immigrants from Britain and Ireland arrived by sailing ships and landed on Port’s white, sandy beach to make a new life. Many stayed instead of walking the three kilometres into John Batman’s new “village” of Melbourne.

Port Melbourne, late 19th century
The Port Melbourne of yesterday looked very different from the quiet, picturesque suburb of today. Sandridge, as it was known, became the centre for industrial and commercial activity in the mid-nineteenth century. A large, swampy lagoon filled the area between Bay Street and the new railway line between Liardet and Bridge streets. Roads were dirty and unmade, the soil was sandy and much of the land was still vacant in 1870.

By 1889 the Port had developed into one of Melbourne's major industrial areas. The suburb pushed westward as seamen, sailors, labourers and factory workers bought up vacant allotments. A railway line divided the town and in 1866 land west of this line was declared "fit for sale".

Graham Street State School

The story of Graham Street State School is the story of Port Melbourne in general: of the hardship, struggle and tenacity which mark the town. The need for a school west of the railway line was recognized as early as 1875, when a site of 2 acres and 16 perches for "Primary School no. 2932" was mentioned in the Government Gazette.

Graham Street Primary School was to join Nott Street Primary School no. 1427 as the second State school in Port Melbourne. Before Nott Street was built in 1874 Port's children had been educated in the National Schools Board School and three denominational schools: the Sandridge Wesleyan Day School, the Sandridge Church of England School, and the Sandridge Roman Catholic School.

Building a school

Graham Street State School no. 2932 was opened as an annexe to Nott Street on Monday, 6 May 1889 by William Webster, M.P. Its opening followed two years of extensive lobbying by the Port Melbourne City Council, who argued that Nott Street's enrolment of 1194 children was 200 over its limit and that a new school should be built to house these extra students.

Built by architects R. Yowes and W.M. Purser, Graham Street was made of red bricks, bluestone, wood and concrete for an initial cost of £2446. Covering a total area of 2550 square feet the school could accommodate 250 children and also boasted a caretaker’s residence.

Like many late nineteenth-century schools it was gothic in character, with long gallery classrooms, gables, a slate roof and a bell tower. The slate roof was to prove Graham Street's undoing over the next 100 years as it was constantly subject to leaks. Attempts at improvement were made in the 1970s, when the slates were replaced by cement tiles, but these proved equally faulty. Only now, in 1989, has a solution been found in a Colourbond corrugated roof, ending years of expensive repairs.

Early difficulties

The years between 1889 and 1920 were not easy ones for Graham Street. Problems with overcrowding surfaced
only one year after the school opened and continued to plague it in subsequent decades.

In 1892 the Head Teacher, Hugh Young, claimed that roughly 50 children west of the railway line had been refused admission to Graham Street because of lack of space. This number included the younger brothers and sisters of children already at the school, and eventually led Young to rent the nearby Mission Hall in order to solve the problem.

Cramped conditions had a poor effect on school morale. In 1892 Young reported that

"The parents have grown more careless from the feeling that they can plead the excuse of the School being full. This is felt very much by the staff of the school, as their best efforts have been directed to inducing the children to attend as regularly as possible".

Truancy was indeed a problem in the late nineteenth century, leading one government representative to state that “hundreds of children in Port Melbourne were not educated at all”.

Finally the Education Department had to listen. An extra room for 100 children, together with a Masters’ office, was completed in 1891 and the school, classified Class 111A, could now house 400 pupils. This was the first of the many renovations and remodellings which would dominate life at Graham Street over the next hundred years.

A “sandy wilderness”.

In its early years Graham Street was at the mercy of its isolated location. A time-traveller journeying back 100 years would have seen a very different Port Melbourne from that of today. Behind the area where the school now stands were nothing but flat sandy wastelands leading down to the Yarra and Port Phillip Bay. North-west was Fishermens Bend, where cattle, sheep and goats grazed on the empty flatlands. To the east, a cluster of houses, shops and factories were the only suggestions of the future direction that the Port would take.

Many early reports of the school tell of the difficulties created by Graham Street’s closeness to the beach. In 1897 the District Inspector commented that “the locality is not an attractive one, the ground being bare sand or made ground”. Lacking either trees or bushes, the new school was subject to high winds and frequent sand-drifts, leading to many cases of “Sandy Blight” amongst the pupils in 1895.

Extremes of heat and cold affected the lives of both pupils and staff. In 1891 Hugh Young lamented that

“... in summer the heat is most oppressive, on account of the sand, and in the winter, the wind and the rain are especially uncomfortable”.

Even in the classrooms, where most children ate their dinner, the sand and dust were “most distressing”. As a result, Young lobbied for gas heating and shelter sheds for the boys and girls and succeeded in gaining these in 1892.

Yet by 1898 Graham Street, like many other Victorian schools, was in a dilapidated condition. Fowls roamed in the yard which was “filthy and full of holes from which some of the children (drank)”. Clearly something had to be done.
Changes are made

Appeals for renovations and extensions are a constant theme of the school's history. In 1907 H. White, Graham Street's Head Teacher, asked the Education Department if Graham Street could be painted and cleaned prior to its reopening as a separate school from Nott Street. It was agreed that Nott Street should be classified a "First Class" and Graham Street a "Second Class" school.

Overcrowding continued to be the school's major problem. It is sometimes difficult to understand how teachers and students coped with the frustration of the tiny, poorly-serviced classrooms. Against average class sizes of 25 children today, classes of 100 pupils were common in the early part of this century. In 1911, however, the situation worsened with 130 Grades 5 and 6 students packed into a room the size of a garage. Teachers had to wait nine years before classrooms were partitioned and two new infant rooms built to house the incoming "babies".

Such cramped and unhealthy conditions hindered the students' schoolwork. A report in *The Argus* of 5 October 1911 stated that "The children have no chance of doing good work, there being no room for their elbows in writing, drawing etc...". Later that year a tent was erected in the school grounds so that the First Lady Assistant could take the infants. Ironically, the spacious and dry tent was a big improvement on the dingy and small gallery classrooms, where kindergarten children had no room for written work. The tent was used again during subsequent improvements to the school.

The Diphtheria epidemic of 1912 added fuel to the fire for school improvements. According to the Head Teacher, M. Shaw, the "dirty and discoloured walls" were a likely harbouring place for many diseases. Shaw concluded that Graham Street was "certainly one of the most neglected schools I have ever seen".

By 1918 the situation had reached a crisis-point. Although attendances had declined from 650 to 400 students, and the school had extended its playground and acquired an extra two acres of land, the Medical Officer of Health still expressed dismay over the run-down state of the school. Claiming that it was "most antiquated and out-of-date", Mr. Davis went on to recommend that the school should either be pulled down or renovated completely. His view was realized in the 1920s as Graham Street moved into its fourth decade of change and development.

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The first teachers

Unlike today, teachers last century did not have to do any formal training. Margaret Fargier and Nellie Ballantine, two of the first female assistants at Port Melbourne, were both past pupils of South Melbourne State School. Nellie was only 17 when she joined Graham Street.

At 18 July 1889 the school's teachers were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles Reddin</td>
<td>Head Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances J. Bell</td>
<td>First Female Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter McGregor</td>
<td>First Male Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphemia Kerr</td>
<td>Temporary Junior Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnes McCallum</td>
<td>Temporary Junior Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Fawse</td>
<td>Pupil Teacher (3 classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May F. Middlemiss</td>
<td>Pupil Teacher (3 classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Fargier</td>
<td>Pupil Teacher (4 classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nellie Ballantine</td>
<td>Pupil Teacher (4 classes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Going to school

Students

From its inception until quite recently most pupils at Graham Street were from working-class families. Of the 415 students enrolled in 1927, most had parents with occupations listed as sailors, factory-workers, enginemen, boilermakers and labourers. This tradition continued in the 1930s when children began arriving from the new State Bank housing estate at Garden City.

The similarity of pupils’ backgrounds made the school community a cohesive one, but Graham Street was not a place for the faint-hearted. Arthur Frost, a student from 1914 to 1920, vividly remembers his first day at Graham Street. Dressed in an ornate lace collar with long curls to his shoulders, Arthur was given a “terrible time” by his school-fellows. The barber set matters right by cutting Arthur’s hair close to the scalp, leaving only one curl for his mother to keep, but Arthur had realized early that school was a matter of the “survival of the fittest”.

Gangs were also a problem. During the “roaring twenties” Graham Street harboured its share of “rough” mobs, reflecting the wider mood of a Melbourne where Squizzy Taylor and other gangsters ruled the streets. One of Arthur’s strongest memories is of the three or four gangs led by the gypsy children who lived at Fishermens Bend:

“The kids were tougher in those days than you get in Port Melbourne today. The gangs cleaned up everybody in the school … if you weren’t in the the gang you got a belting every day”.

Arthur’s son Gary similarly remembers his classmates of the 1950s as “tough kids but good kids”. The school community banded together against outsiders, whether on the football field or in the playground. For those who did not fit in, like the many migrant children “fresh from the boats”, Graham Street offered a tough and uncompromising introduction to Australia.

School routines

School days last century were longer than they are now. Each Monday morning at 9.00 am students would salute the flag and swear allegiance to “King and Country”. Boys playing the bugle and tin drum would provide the music as the rest of the pupils marched into class. Lunch lasted for an hour and in the 1920s morning and afternoon playtime broke up the day for restless boys and girls.

Together with standard school holidays State School students commemorated special occasions. Anzac Day, the King’s Birthday, the Queen’s Birthday, Coronation Day and Empire Day were red-letter days in the early twentieth century.

In 1889 subjects taught did not vary significantly in Victorian State Schools. Pupils at Port Melbourne were instructed in singing, drawing, arithmetic, music, needlework, grammar, dictation, writing and geography. “Moral Lessons” and “Military Drill” were also taught and in 1892 Graham Street had its own cadet corps and set of rifles. Physical education became part of the curriculum in the early 1900s, with calisthenics joining cricket and football as an escape from the “3 Rs”.
Writing itself was an onerous task. Younger pupils scribbled on slates with dusters tied to the corners while older students used pen and ink to fashion the copperplate script. A set of world animals hinted at the mystery of foreign lands in the days before film, and children were instructed regularly in matters of hygiene after 1912.

By the 1920s pupils were being “streamed” into “academic” and “non-academic” groups. Classes were divided into four grades - A1, A2, B Right and B Left - with the “academics” in the A grades. The “B” students, which included most pupils, went on either to a Technical school or to be apprenticed to a tradesman. The more gifted pupils went on to Post-Primary schools.

Graham Street State School was quite revolutionary in its attitude towards “remedial” pupils. Recognizing that many of its poorer students had learning difficulties, in 1946 the school introduced one of the first remedial classes in Victoria for children who had problems with mathematics, English, or general learning. This “Opportunity Grade” continued until 1960 when a lack of pupils no longer made it viable.

The school changed both physically and socially in the twenties and thirties. Extensive renovations occupied the early twenties when the school’s interior was remodelled and the new infant rooms were added. Arthur Frost recalls being shifted out to the Methodist Church Hall in Graham Street. Graham Street also rented the Farrell Street Church, the Temperance Hall and the Baptist Church Kindergarten Hall, while grades 3 and 4 and their teacher found temporary accommodation at Nott Street.

But in the 1920s the winds of change blew in other ways. The depression hit Port Melbourne hard, with soup kitchens being established in Graham Street and other local schools. As Nancy U’Ren and Noel Turnbull state in A History of Port Melbourne, “people were really starving”, and this filtered through to the students with many receiving only one meal a day. Typically, the Graham Street community banded together with both teachers and students regularly bringing extra food to school for underprivileged families. “Everybody stuck by everybody in Port Melbourne”.

Yet all was not unmitigated gloom and doom. In the twenties and thirties Graham Street saw several “special events” and many smaller celebrations. Undoubtedly the grandest of these was a visit by the Duke and Duchess of York to Port Melbourne in 1927. Hazel Trembath from
Graham Street joined with two other girls to present the Duchess with “a gift for Baby Betty”. The wooden workbox contained a plate inscribed, “to the Princess Elizabeth - From the school children of Port Melbourne” and gave Hazel a memory which she would never forget.

Far less important than that, but just as exciting, were the many sports days and concerts which marked the school year. The new junior room, or "babies" class, proved an ideal venue for plays, singing and dancing. During the 1920s children staged "penny concerts" where everyone took a turn at entertaining the audience. One of Arthur Frost’s most enduring memories is of playing his first violin duet with George Miller to the tune "Peggy O’Neill".

Another highlight of this era was the “greening” of the school. In 1938 children planted cypress and poplar trees around the perimeter of the oval to keep the wind, sand and rain at bay. One ex-pupil, Heather Whale, recalls that in the forties each tree was named after a student. Heather’s half-sister’s tree bore her name on it on a silver plaque. In 1988 children like Josh O’Neill and Rebecca McCleave continued the tradition set by their grandparents when they planted twenty peppercorn trees around the school oval and raised the $7 needed to buy each tree.

1939 saw the advent of World War Two and an influx of new students from the Housing Commission development at Fishermens Bend. In line with its increased enrolment the school was fully re-conditioned and the inner walls made “bright and attractive” with a new coat of paint. In the winter, boys brought in firewood to warm the chilly classrooms and at lunchtime some children clustered around open fires while others braved the wind and rain for the freedom of the playing fields.

The War figured prominently in school life. Graham Street students contributed to the war effort by collecting rubber, tins and waste paper, by buying war savings certificates, and through special efforts in needlework and woodwork. Boys made camouflage nets while girls knitted woollen comforts for soldiers away at the front, and trenches were dug in the grounds in case of a sudden air-raid attack by Japan or Germany.

A particular effect of the war was the use of ex-soldiers to staff the school. One former pupil remembers the brutality of her Head Teacher, who had previously been an officer in the army. Even small children were beaten with a cane for an offence as minor as speaking too softly at assembly. In those days, there was little recognition of the devastating effects of war on the men and women who served for their country.
days interesting and a recorder band was formed to assist at assembly. By 1962 the school had added a hired television and typewriter to its collection of teaching aids, and in 1954 a new art-craft room was built to teach students woodwork, weaving and other manually-based activities.

But for many of the children sport remained the highlight of their school lives. As in the 1920s, Graham Street excelled at sport with proud records in cricket, football and netball competitions. Triple Brownlow medallist Bob Skilton, a pupil from 1944 to 1950, fondly remembers Graham Street as a “good sporting school”. Playing as a Rover Bob recalls days of

“... great tussles with Nott Street, Eastern Road and Middle Park primaries. The teachers were absolutely terrific; they encouraged you to play sport and got into it with you. They’d even have a kick before and after school. Those were great days”.

Graham Street catered for all levels of sporting ability. Each lunchtime excited boys and girls would form practice teams for the inter-school sports of crossball, tunnelball and skipball. Swimming was also included in the syllabus with after-school trips to Stubbs’ baths, South Melbourne, providing a welcome diversion in the summer months.

The fifties and sixties also saw the introduction of a number of charitable programs, following on from the War Service efforts of the previous decade. Children worked hard for charity, contributing to the Gould League of Bird Lovers, the School Service League, the Schools’ Relief Committee and the Red Cross Appeal. A school bank, introduced in the fifties, taught pupils the importance of thrift and saving. As a result, school morale
was high, leading an Inspector to comment in 1957 that "there is a distinct pupil pride in school; pupils are natural and friendly in approach". Graham Street was indeed a happy place.

Port Melbourne Marching Champions, 1964.

Football Team, 1965.

Schooling in the seventies

The seventies were a time of excitement and transition for Primary School no. 2932. After years of sporadic attention by the Education Department Graham Street finally received funds for a new library and building began in 1974. The library remains an important feature of the school today with space for over 5000 books.

Reflecting the mood of the "beat generation" students and staff dressed in cheesecloth, platform shoes, hot pants and treads and went camping at places like Torquay, Beechworth and Wallan. School routines and lessons also "loosened up". Although a student from 1889 would have recognized subjects like English, Mathematics, Reading, Music and Art, he or she would have been amazed at the relaxed classroom atmosphere and the easy rapport between pupils and teachers.

Much of this rapport stemmed from 1970s experiments in teaching methods. Departing from the rigid curriculum structure of the earlier decades, educators sought to foster "freedom of expression" in students. As a result, Graham Street witnessed many innovations, amongst them an integrated Grades 1 to 4 class, English lessons for migrant children, and "team" teaching.

"Child-based" learning was the central premise of the Graham Street syllabus. Instead of dividing pupils into
classes based on age and ability, teachers introduced “learning centres” which encouraged children to develop their own areas of interest such as science, art, music or nature. One spectacular result of this was the growth of an enormous pumpkin which left a vine trailing around the classroom. An “huge amount” of art and craft developed from this gastronomic masterpiece but no record remains of the pumpkin’s fate. Hopefully such an inspiring vegetable did not end up in a soup tureen!

This was also a time of high staff morale. Graham Street was one of the first schools to introduce a mixed staffroom, leading to an unparalleled period of cooperation and friendship amongst the teachers. Lorraine Siska, a current staff member who joined the school in 1972, recalls that

“The staff were fantastic in the early seventies. We all sat around a small table in the area where the kitchen is now, and everything was discussed. It was like a counselling session; they were very, very close. It made the school work. I’ve seen some very gifted teachers pass through Graham Street and the kids have also become very attached to each other.

Graham Street has been very lucky in a lot of ways”.

Although the main building remains the same, everything else has changed over the last century at Graham Street Primary School.

Children today come from a wider variety of backgrounds than ever before. Pupils from traditional “Port” families such as Josh O’Neill and Jade Critch are joined by new arrivals like Ayhan Yurekkturk, Daniella Miletic and Kylie Newell. The dedicated teachers under the guidance of principal Beverley Lewis offer a wide and challenging syllabus. Graham Street pupils are privileged to learn art, library studies, music, dancing, and sport in addition to their regular school subjects. The school also offers speech therapy, remedial gymnasium, an education unit and visiting teacher services, counselling, and a special assistance unit for children with learning difficulties.

Graham Street Primary School is currently undergoing extensive renovations with funds provided by the Education Department and Historic Buildings Council. These renovations will add modern amenities to a school with a long and proud history. The many children and staff who have passed through Graham Street since 1889 would undoubtedly rejoice to see their old school “make good”.

Where to now? The sky’s the limit!
During its centenary year Grades 4 and 5, under Jan Henry-Jones, worked with a Monash University student to examine Graham Street's history. The pupils' responses provide a fitting end to this story:

"I love my school's big oval. I like the way we get to have assembly. Our teachers talk about the choices we get. We can earn treats. I love art and library".
**Julia Smith.**

"The yard is friendly and I like sport: football, basketball, soccer, netball, running, jogging".
**James Collier.**

"I like... caring teachers, big rooms, the Police Program, the nice yard behaviour, special things."
**Shaun MacPherson.**

"The people are friendly and we have Junior School council".
**Nathan Hatton.**

"I like the excursions our school goes on because they are organized for you and they are so much fun and I like the library. I am 9 years old and I get to borrow two books".
**Daniella Miletic.**

"All the stuff we do is really fun. I like music and I like our dancing teacher".
**Fiona Judd.**

"I like art because you do interesting things".
**Jennie Allen.**

"I like art because we do drawings and headings and we have a wonderful art teacher".
**Josh O'Neill.**

"Our school is a big school. We have library lessons and dancing every Monday with teachers. People care."
**Ayhan Yurekelturk.**

"I like how the building is made. I don't like where the toilets are. I like it when Mr. Maw takes us dancing."
**Bradley Hinge.**

"I like the play equipment so we can play and I like the trees for some shade."
**Lisa Patton.**

"We have special things, you earn points, treats and free time."
**Michael Sotiropidis.**

**AND FINALLY...**

"Our school is a school where the rooms have mixed grades, I like that. We go on excursions about twice a month to places like the museum and the zoo. They're all about us and our world.

Our principal is a caring principal and some schools have principals who don't understand and don't reward good behaviour. It is like a city here. We've got new parts and bits being made new. There are lots of exciting things happening all the time".
**William Murphy.**
The Graham Street school community 1989

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Beverley Lewis
Lorraine Siska
Terry Mavratsou
Jan Henry-Jones
Maree Fay
Diana Watts
Frances Keenan
Glenda Mickleburgh
Maggie Jacobs
Pam Snowden
Glenys Ditton
Effie Asimakipoulos
Wendy Murphy
Tina Sotiroidis
Chris Raeburn

Head Teacher
Librarian/Art
Grade 5/6
Grade 4/5
Grade 3/4
Grade 1/2
Prep Grade
Integration Aide
S.A.U.
Secretary
Teacher Aide
Ethnic Aide
Cleaner
Cleaner
School Council President

Students

Grade 6

Kristie Allen
Chelsea Daniel
Sarah Gorfine
Sandra Healey
Donna Hidson
Aynur Karatekeli
Sherri Massey
Symone McDonald
Dayjelle Smith
Haroula Sotiroidis
Fiona Tarticchio

Con Argyriou
Urim Bajraktarevic
Daniel Gorton
Kevin Green
John Newton
Douglas Patton
Phillip Pikos
Craig Smith
Steven Taylor
Archie Tserepis

Grade 5

Veronica Camilleri
Jade Critch
Fiona Judd
Zoe Koklas
Melanie Nugent
Lisa Patton
Kylie Newell
Brendan McDonald

Marc Duggan
Nathan Hatton
William Murphy
Fotis Serafingos
Ayhan Yurekturk
Tyron Barker
Paul Bradley
Chris Gatzikos

Grade 4

Jennie Allen
Toni Dove
Daniella Miletic
Aana Morgan
Ingrid Mulezy
Julia Smith
Rachel Newton
Nektaria Tolios
Michael Sotiroidis
James Collier

Steve Camilleri
Sam Burke
Steven Healey
Bradley Hinge
Shaun MacPherson
David McKerrow
Josh O'Neill
John Theodosakis
Joel Snowden

Grade 3

Tsara Barker
Tenele Collins
Erin McKerrow
Rebecca McLease
Dianne McGrath
Kerry Patton
Rebecca Winters
Julio Orr
Eddie Simonescue
Mahir Unilan
Ali Yalcin

Besim Bajraktarevic
Bradley Boyd
Rajesh Chander
Wade D'Andrea
Elvir Dragovic
John Fotopoulos
Gary Gaylor
Arthur Gatzikos
Nick Costea
Glen Naismith
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