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HISTORIC KONA

HAWAIIAN HISTORY COMES TO LIFE ALONG THIS
BEAUTIFUL, RUGGED COAST OF THE BIG ISLAND.

BY JOHN HECKATHORN. PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID CROXFORD.

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EVERYWHERE YOU TURN ON THE Kona Coast, you encounter traces of the past.

On this lava-filled leeward coast of Hawai'i's Big Island, Capt. James Cook died, in a skirmish over a rowboat.

Only a few miles from where Cook perished, Kamehameha the Great fought his first major battle.

After nearly 30 years of struggle to unify the kingdom, Kamehameha enjoyed his final years in a grass *hale* on the shores of Kailua Bay.

In the same spot, six months after Kamehameha's death, his heir, Liholiho, and his favorite wife, Queen Regent Ka'ahumanu, abolished the *kapu* system, the religious and social laws that governed traditional Hawaiian society.

A year later, into this same harbor, and into the cultural vacuum created by the breaking of the *kapu*, sailed the brig *Thetis* with the first New England missionaries.

Kona was the tumultuous center of the Hawaiian kingdom, long before the capital moved to Honolulu. To find traces of the past in Kona, all you have to do is look.

On a morning walk around our home base, the Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort, we happened upon ruins of Hawaiian dwellings and *heiau*.

Just five minutes up the coast, at the Keauhou Beach Resort, we found ourselves—thanks to an old friend, manager Paul Horner—up on the hotel's roof, from which we could spot not one, but several *heiau*, the concentration of ancient temples a reminder that this was an important place in traditional Hawaiian culture.

Two of these *heiau*—Hapaiali'i and Ke'ekū—rise imposingly at the water's edge, massive constructions of lava rock.

Over the centuries, many similar Hawaiian *heiau* have been destroyed by development, leaving bare stone outlines. Here, however, the major landowner, Kamehameha Investments, is actively restoring them—as accurately as possible, with a team of archaeologists, cultural experts and experts in *uhau humu pōhaku*, the Hawaiian art of dry-stack masonry.

"The Hawaiians knew what they were doing," says Horner. He points out how the sloping, dry-stacked, mortarless walls of the *heiau* stand up much better to the pounding surf than a modern, cement-mortared wall just up the coast.

"Hapaiali'i was also a kind of calendar," adds Horner. "See that big observation stone in the middle? That's not new. It was original. The Hawaiians put it there for good reason."

When the *heiau* was reconstructed to precise measurements, the builders realized that, if you stood on the observation stone during the

winter solstice, the sun set precisely behind a rock at one corner. During the summer solstice, it set precisely above the other corner.

Because Hapaiali'i was flat, says Horner, it was probably used for public prayer. Its walled companion, Ke'ekū *heiau*, had a grimmer purpose. It was a *luakini*, a place of human sacrifice. Behind the lava-rock walls, a 16th-century Maui chief, defeated after a bitter battle, was bloodily sacrificed. His two dogs, one white, one black, died in grief at their master's fate. They are buried in the corners of the *heiau*, as spiritual guardians, and their story told in petroglyphs visible at low tide.

There are 37 *heiau*, some mere traces, and dozens of other historic sites, in the Kona coast's Keauhou region alone. For a survey of them and an update on the restorations, you can stop by the free Heritage Center in the Keauhou Shopping Center.

Keauhou is the old name for an ancient land division called an *ahupua'a* (which stretched from the mountains to the sea). You can see the boundaries of the old *ahupua'a*, now marked with carved wooden posts, as you make the short drive from Keauhou to the town of Kailua-Kona—or, as it now refers to itself after considerable sprucing up, Historic Kailua Village.

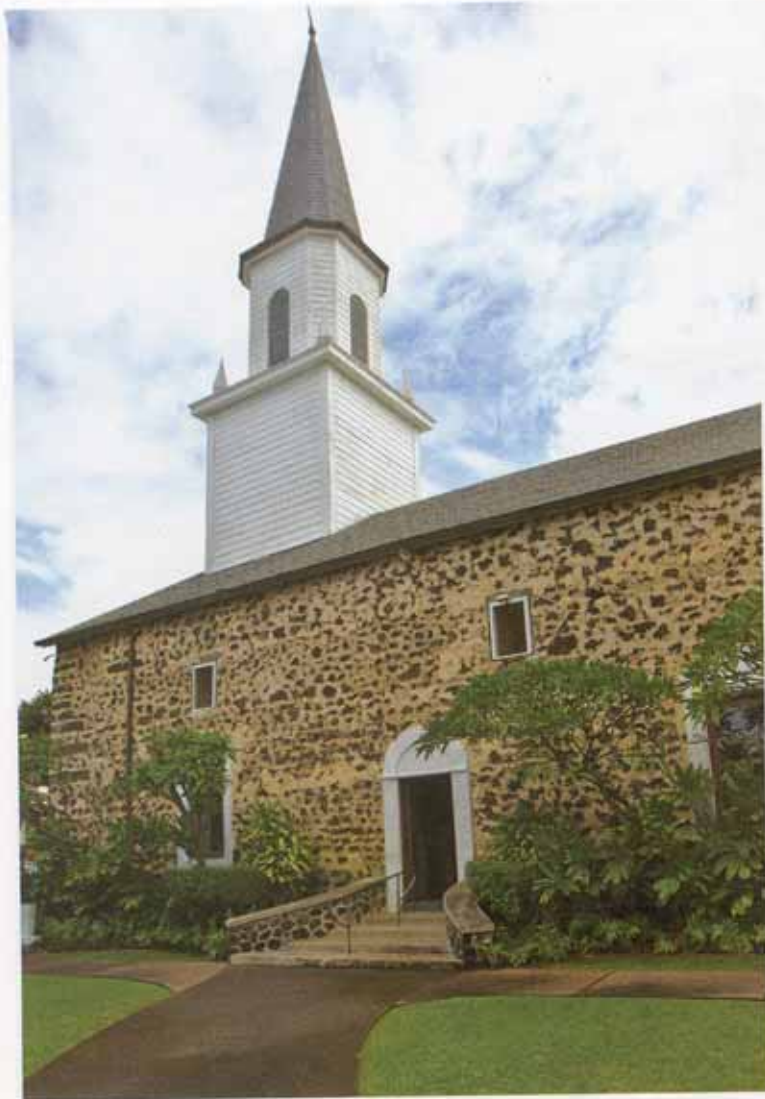
The most historic buildings in Historic Kailua Village sit across the street from each other: Moku'aikaua Church and Hulihe'e Palace. Moku'aikaua was the first Christian church in the Islands—and remains a dark and dusty monument to the first missionaries who sailed into Kailua Bay in 1820 on the 85-foot *Thetis*, after an arduous, 163-day voyage from Boston.

The 17 members of the missionary company brought New England ways with them, and boasted that the graceful, 112-foot spire of Moku'aikaua, once the dominant landmark on this coast, was "almost a facsimile of some that anciently stood in the commons of many a New England village."

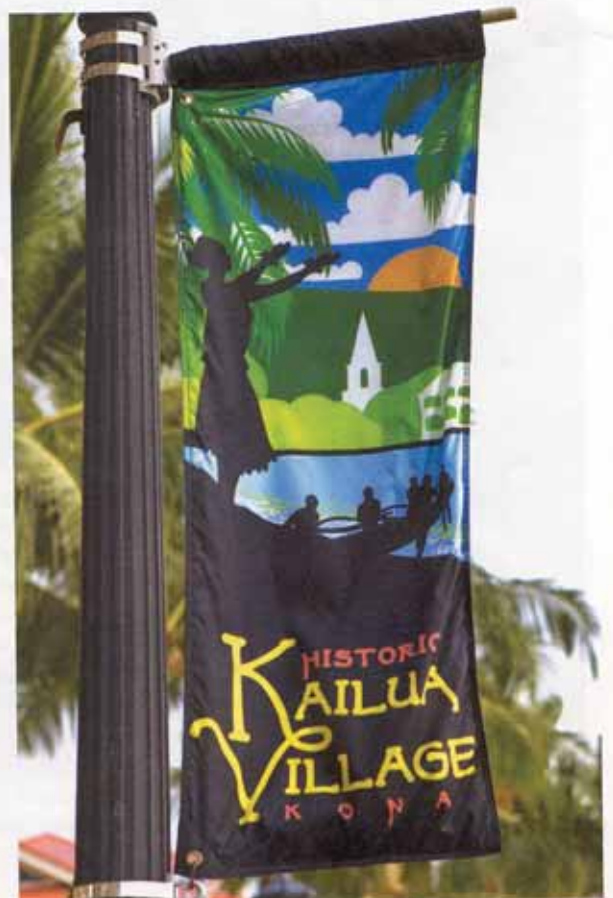
The missionaries left an indelible mark on the Islands. The missionary company on the *Thetis* was led by Rev. Asa Thurston. His grandson, Lorrin, would become a prime mover in overthrowing the Hawaiian monarchy and annexing Hawai'i to the United States.

Before that happened, the Hawaiian monarchs enjoyed themselves in Hulihe'e Palace, just across the street. The palace is only a year newer than Moku'aikaua, built in 1838, but, in sharp contrast to the old church, it has been restored to sparkling condition, with repairs necessitated by damage from the 2006 earthquake.

Built by John Kuakini, the governor of the Big Island, the palace eventually passed down to Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani, who slept in a



Clockwise from left: Moku'aikaua, the first Christian church in the Islands • Palace administrator Fanny Au Hoy • New banners in a spruced-up Historic Kailua Village • Restored Hulihe'e Palace sparkles.





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thatched hale on the grounds, though the palace itself saw the slumbers of many visiting royals.

Ruth was the richest woman of her time. "She was also one of the largest, she weighed 440 pounds," says "Auntie" Fanny Au Hoy, the palace administrator. Au Hoy points to an oversize chair in one of the upstairs bedrooms. "If I try to sit in her chair, my feet don't touch the ground."

Au Hoy, from an ancient Big Island family, followed her mother as head of the palace. "It's simple as palaces go," she says, "only six rooms on two floors, but everything here is absolutely authentic." The treasures on display include Kamehameha I's personal war spears, as oversize as the man himself; Princess Kapi'olani's koa traveling trunk, lined with lead against the rigors of sea travel; and an ornately carved koa wardrobe, a testament to Hawaiian woodworking skill that won a silver medal in the Paris Exhibition of 1889.

The wardrobe, like many of the other Victorian touches, including the 22-karat-gold moldings on the walls, are all works commissioned by King David Kalākaua, who inherited the palace in the 1880s.

The palace is filled with fresh flowers—"Always fresh, even if I have to bring them from my own garden," says Au Hoy. It's also perfectly situated to catch the cooling tradewinds. It's so comfortable we settle in for a long conversation with Au Hoy on the back lanai. "Kona is where the monarchs romped and played," she says. "So much history was played out here."

From where we sit, she points across the water to where Kamehameha lived from 1812 until his death in 1819. His personal heiau, Ahu'ena, still stands, on the grounds of the King Kamehameha Kona Beach Hotel. "So many past glories, so much history that I learn something new every day," says Au Hoy.

There's plenty of history to learn in Kona, and it did not end with the passing of the Kamehameha dynasty. As the 19th century wore on, Kona's story became the story of many nationalities.

Among them was the Englishman, Henry Nicholas Greenwell, whose attempt to join the California Gold Rush went awry, but who luckily ended up on this coast in 1850, just as foreigners were allowed to purchase land.

Greenwell went on to become customs collector, postmaster, school inspector, storekeeper, rancher and entrepreneur. His headquarters, just south of Kailua-Kona, have become the center for the Kona Historical Society, which now boasts 1,000 members nationwide.

The society doesn't want dusty museums. It wants history to live.

For instance, in Greenwell's store, visitors interact with a costumed storekeeper and are given a shopping list that might have belonged to, say, a 19th-century Portuguese dairy farmer. The storekeeper finds whatever that dairy farmer might have needed, from a wool shirt to a new butter churn.

The choice of a Portuguese dairy farmer is not random. The Portuguese arrived in Kona



The Kona Historical Society's Ann Kern, as a 19th-century storekeeper, makes the past come alive at the H. N. Greenwell Store Museum. • Opposite page: All the royal furniture in Hulihe'e Palace is authentic—and priceless.



in the 1870s, bringing with them not only expertise in managing dairies, but also their baking traditions.

On Thursdays, you can relive that tradition. A young couple, Lewis and Carla Drexler, light up a kiawe fire in the society's *forno*, an 8-foot-diameter stone oven like those used by the Portuguese immigrants. When the oven heats up, they shovel the coals out.

The stones hold heat long enough to bake 96 golden loaves of Portuguese sweet bread. Lewis has to use a metal paddle with a 10-foot handle to get loaves in and out of the oven. "It's 450 degrees," he says. "I've learned not to stick my head in to see how things are going."

Visitors are welcome to help prepare the loaves—and sample some finished sweetbread. Carla sells the rest up by the highway. At \$7 each, the loaves are gone in two hours. Baked the old-fashioned way, each loaf is a tribute to the hard-working Portuguese women who brought to Hawai'i one of its favorite foods.

After the Portuguese, many Japanese arrived in the Islands to work the growing sugar plantations. Their contracts up, some came to Kona for a more independent life. One of them, Daisuku Uchida, began a small coffee farm in 1913.

His son, Masao, farmed that land as well, until 1997. The Kona Historical Society has preserved the farm, but not as a museum. The farm is still alive, producing coffee.

Things are so lively when we arrive, it looks like the farmhouse is on fire.

"Don't worry," says Pauline Nishida-Miller. "I'm just cooking rice."

Nishida-Miller—wearing an apron made of a recycled rice sack and a vintage dress her grandmother might have worn—is laboring in the farm house kitchen over a wood fire. There's no chimney here, the smoke just pours out of an opening above the stove.

The wooden house is simple, tin roof, wood walls with gaps that let the sunshine and weather in. "Actually, it's a better house than the one I grew up in, just a few miles away," says Nishida-Miller.

Using sustainable resources, recycling, living off the grid—all these are trendy again. As Nishida-Miller demonstrates, the Uchida Farm was doing all those things back when they were necessities. The wood for the fire is collected from the farm's coffee trees. The vegetables in the simple lunch are grown in the farm's garden. Even the filter on the faucet is a Bull Durham sack like the one in which Daisuku Uchida used to buy his tobacco.

"They recycled everything," says Nishida-Miller. "They had to. This was nearly a cashless society."

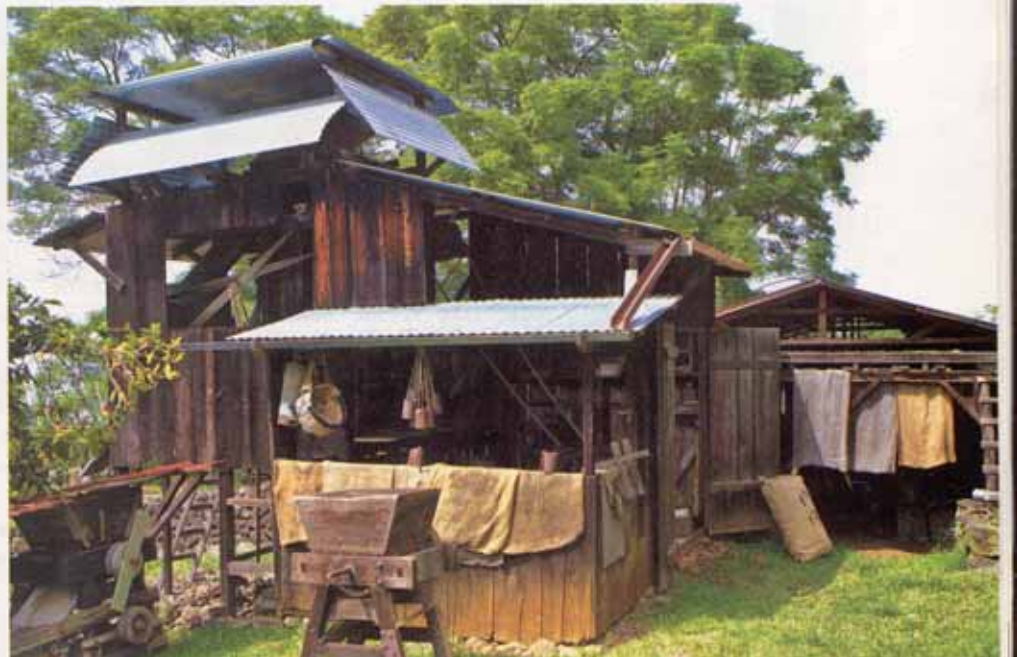
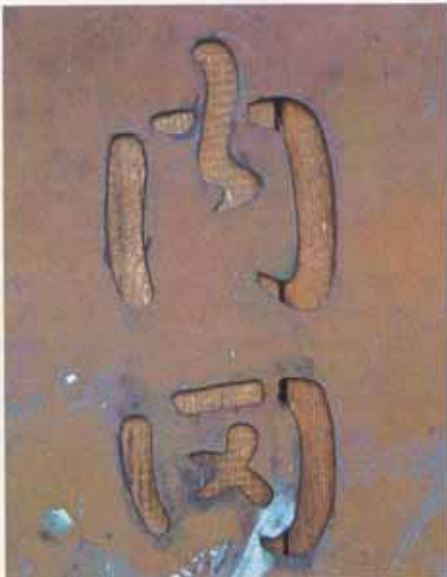
On the sloping lands of the farm, another costumed performer, Yolanda Olson, shows how to pick ripe coffee beans off the trees. (Most Kona coffee grown on hillsides is still handpicked).

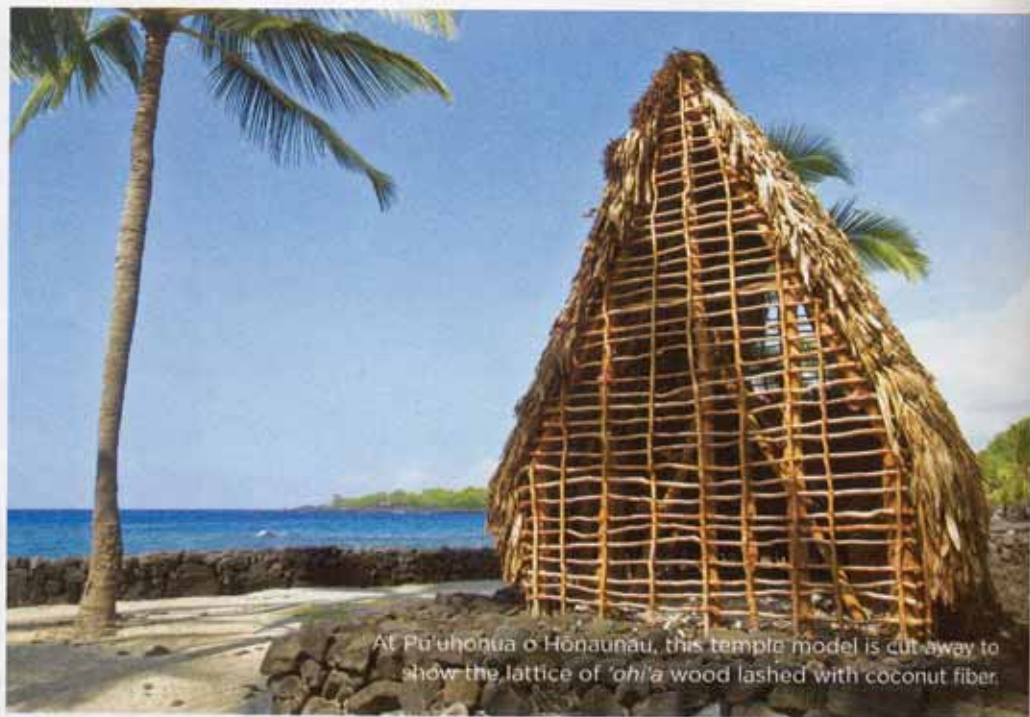
A farmer could get more money from processed than raw beans, so the ever industrious Uchidas built their own coffee mill, powered by a three-horsepower two-cycle John Deere engine. Olson shows how it's done. She grinds the red pulp off the coffee cherries, washes the beans by soaking them in water, and then dries them in the sun on a flat roof called a *hoshida*, raking them so they dry evenly. The dried beans—called parchment—

WE'VE INCLUDED THE RECIPE FOR PAO DOCE, PORTUGUESE SWEET BREAD, ON PAGE 47. YOU WON'T NEED A STONE OVEN.



Clockwise from above: Pauline Nishida-Miller feeds the wood fire in the kitchen of the Kona Coffee Living History Farm • The farm's coffee mill • Each bag of coffee was stenciled with the Uchida's trademark • Opposite page: Lewis Drexler bakes Portuguese sweet bread in a traditional stone oven.





At Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau, this temple model is cut away to show the lattice of 'ohi'a wood lashed with coconut fiber.

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are then bagged and carried by donkey to the wholesaler.

The farm still has a donkey, Charlie, who seems content to munch grass around the macadamia nut trees rather than do any work today.

No history book can bring life to a coffee farm like this one. The Kona Historical Society is raising money—it's difficult in the recession—to create a historic ranch on the same model. Kona has a long ranching tradition, and it, too, needs a dose of living history.

History seems alive, too, at one of the best-known ancient sites on this coast, Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau, the City of Refuge, now a National Historical Park.

These 420 acres of preserved Hawaiian past come with a new, high-tech flourish. At Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau, you can call (808) 217-9279 and get an audio tour of the park on your cell phone. (You pay for cell minutes, but otherwise, like the park, it's free.)

The park contains both a royal compound and a walled city of refuge, the pu'uhonua, where breakers of kapu and others in trouble could take refuge behind the 17-foot-thick, 10-foot-high lava wall. The refuge was made even more sacred by the remains of 23 high chiefs interred in the Hale o Keawe, a replica of which, complete with fierce ki'i statues, stands to this day. The pu'uhonua is still considered

holy ground by many Native Hawaiians—and in modern times, an occasional Hawaiian activist takes shelter here against the authorities.

The park presents ancient sites in as close to their original condition as you are likely to find anywhere. We encountered Charley Grace, dressed like his ancestors in a malo and carving ki'i for the park. Grace works in the old manner (not quite, he uses metal tools, which didn't appear until after Cook). "Young people, they don't have the patience to work months on something anymore," he says. "It's hard, but it's the right way."

His brother, he notes, is up at Keauhou, patiently carving ki'i for the newly restored Ke'ekū heiau there, which will soon be even more authentic with its own fierce battlement of ancient ki'i.

This was once a fierce and wild place. Just across the bay from the park, Kamehameha I won his first great victory at the Battle of Moku'ōhai. A shark-tooth dagger ended the life of the Big Island chief who was his greatest rival. During the battle, women and children from both sides fled to the City of Refuge for safety.

After the fighting, many of the warriors from the defeated side swam feverishly across the bay to sanctuary here in the pu'uhonua—secure in Hawaiian traditions that no one knew would soon be swept away by the course of history. †

You can support the Kona Historical Society's efforts to preserve the history and culture of the Kona coast by donating on the web: www.konahistorical.org



PORTUGUESE SWEET BREAD (PAO DOCE)

Every Thursday, the Kona Historical Society bakes up 96 loaves of Portuguese bread in a large wood-fired stone oven called a *forno*. Someone has to get up and start the fire inside the oven at 6 a.m. You can skip this step, and bake this delicious bread in your home oven, following the society's traditional recipe.

Why do you roll the risen dough into seven balls for each loaf? Seven is a lucky number for the Portuguese.

FOR FOUR LOAVES:

In a large bowl, mix:
2 cups warm water
4 packages dry yeast

Then stir in:
2 cups sugar
2 sticks melted butter
4 eggs

Then stir in, one cup at a time:
8 cups bread flour

Stir in up to two more cups of flour as needed to make a soft dough. When the dough is too difficult to stir, turn dough out on a floured table and knead in the rest of the flour for about 3 to 5 minutes. Add more flour if needed to keep the dough from sticking to the table.

Put the dough back in the bowl and cover it until it has doubled in size (about an hour). Punch the dough down and form into four equal-sized loaves. Pinch off seven equal pieces of dough from each loaf, roll and place in greased 9-inch round aluminum pans. Let the dough rise again until doubled in size (about an hour) and brush with an egg wash made by mixing an egg with 2 Tbsp. water.

Bake in a 400-degree oven for 20 to 30 minutes.

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