



CITY OF GOSNELLS

HERITAGE

# Short History of Orange Grove



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# Introduction

The first settlers appeared in the wider Canning area from 1829. They were often a combination of naval officers, merchants and gentleman who considered their land an investment to profit from without expending too much energy. Many of these pioneers never saw their properties, either because they lived abroad or chose to settle in the more populated areas of Perth and Fremantle and employed agents to manage their land.

By 1832, the Crown had reclaimed land which had not been developed or settled on. Those who did decide to live on their properties were often ex-soldiers with little farming experience. Not all were successful however many of them prospered through their hard work and determination.

The second wave of settlers were a mixed group of convicts, ticket-of-leave men, labourers, servants and publicans who started arriving in the wider Canning area during the 1840s and 1850s. These men were generally more practical than many of the merchants and gentlemen and although it took some time for them to gain an understanding of the effects of the Australian climate on their crops, they went on to become more successful farmers.

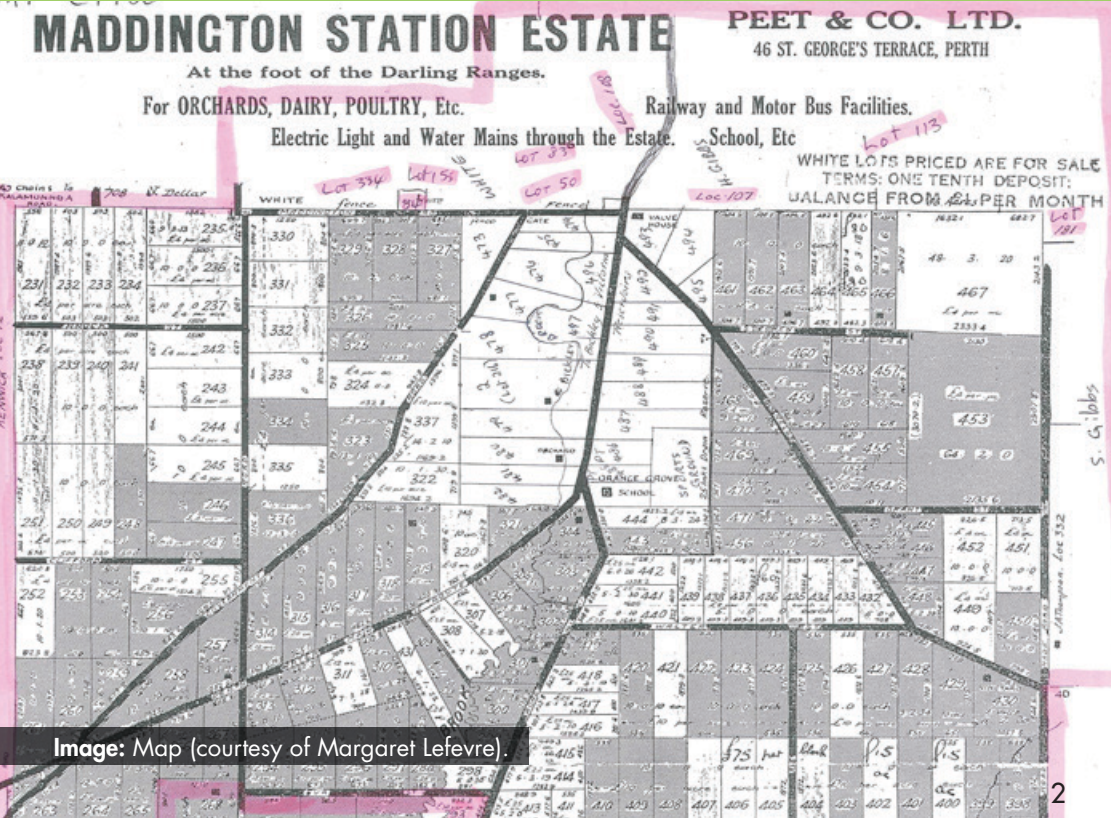


Image: Map (courtesy of Margaret Lefevre).

## The White family

Richard White arrived in the Swan River Colony in 1842 with his wife Elizabeth and several children. He worked as an agricultural labourer until the 1850's when he was recorded as occupying Canning Locations 7 and 8, which he was likely renting from owner Samuel Moore. By 1860, White had been successful producing crops and livestock and bought the 1,226 acre property from Moore for £300.

Richard's son, Jabez, became a very successful farmer and pioneer of the Orange Grove district. Originally a ship's carpenter, Jabez married Sarah Lewis in 1848 and in 1860 successfully applied for a grant of 40 acres in Orange Grove. Jabez is said to have walked from Maddington to his Orange Grove property every day to build his wife and eleven children a family home.



**Image:** Jabez White.



**Image:** Sarah White.

Images courtesy of City of Gosnells historic photograph collection.

By 1896 Jabez was the owner of approximately 856.5 acres of land, which his sons Henry (Harry), Jabez Junior, Samuel and Thomas worked with him. As well as his crops and livestock, Jabez also constructed a flour mill. He was mentioned in an article in the W.A. Times on Friday 22 December 1876:

**“Our district can now boast a flour mill erected by Mr Jabez White. It is hoped the settlers in this district will, instead of depending on the merchants for their supply of flour, grow their own wheat, and patronise the energetic settler.”**

The flour mill operated successfully in the 1870s and 1880s but was unable to be used as effectively after the Victoria Dam was opened in 1891 and the volume of water flowing down Bickley Brook was greatly diminished. When the Government took control of the Victoria Dam in 1896 and formed the Metropolitan Water Supply, they compensated the White family with free use of mains water for the time the property was in the ownership of the White family. This was the case until 1980.

The mill could be hand-operated and during the early 1900's was used occasionally to crush oats for fodder. It fell into disuse in later years and was burned down in a bushfire in 1951. The meticulously carved millstones were cracked in this fire and the pieces now reside at the Wilkinson Homestead Museum in Gosnells.

Jabez's wife, Sarah White, died of measles in 1884, aged 52 years. When Jabez died in 1899, he left his property to be divided amongst his unmarried children, these being sons Henry (Harry), Jabez Junior (Jabe), Samuel and Thomas. To his youngest daughter, Priscilla (Dellar) he left 'two milk cows and their calves, to be chosen by her from his herd'. The three older girls were not mentioned in his will.



**Image:** Flour mill (image courtesy of City of Gosnells historic photograph collection).

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## Local industry

For many years settlers and their families lived in tents or sheds on their properties while clearing the land to build suitable homes. Most families were reasonably self-sufficient with cows for milk, chickens for eggs and gardens used to grow vegetables.

Orange Grove was quite isolated from Perth and the rest of the Gosnells district. Families needed to work hard to establish profitable farms and support each other in their seclusion.

Although several early farmers tried their hand at cropping, citrus orchards proved to be more successful and were the primary source of income for farmers. Some enterprising settlers from Eastern Europe established wineries in Orange Grove, Maddington and Kenwick, but the Australian preference for beer made it a difficult business. Some persistent viticulturists, such as the Radojkovich family, supplemented their vines by planting vegetable crops between the grapes.

Valdemar (Wally) Radojkovich arrived in WA, aged 16, from Yugoslavia in 1924. He worked as a farm labourer in Upper Swan until 1929 when he partnered with Mick Borich and bought ten and a quarter acres in Reservoir Road. Here they established a vineyard, Jadran, with Wally also working at Dunstan's Blue Rock Quarry six days a week for six years. At the quarry, Wally broke rock by hand with a 14 pound hammer and in the evenings returned to Jadran to plant vines and build the original winery and house.

In 1931, Wally married Betty Hayward, daughter of an English migrant family and they had four children, Stephen, Ray, Betty and Margaret. In 1936 he bought out Mick Borich's share of the property.

Wine sales in those days were not sufficient to make a living, so cash crops of peas and potatoes were grown between the vines. This practice continued until 1951, except during the War when beer was in short supply and more people drank wine. After World War II, with the influx of many European migrants, wine became a more popular drink and the Jadran vineyard became well-known. It is still in operation and is run by Wally's eldest son, Stephen, and his grandson, Paul.

## Orange Grove School

The number of school age children began increasing in the area from the early 1900s. With the nearest school in Maddington almost 6km away, many parents were forced to drive their young children to and from school each day by horse and cart, with some parents allowing their older children to drive themselves. This was time consuming, and could also be a dangerous trip, as demonstrated by an accident in February 1922. The five Serventy children, ranging in age from 6 to 12 years, were being driven home from school in Maddington by one of the children. They were crossing the railway line as a goods train came through, killing their horse and overturning the cart, throwing the children out. None of the children were harmed, but the goods train continued on, apparently unaware of the incident.

In May 1922, a petition was sent to R.S. Sampson MLA, requesting a school building. This was signed by nine parents who had 22 children between them. In January 1923, Mrs White wrote again to Mr Sampson advising there were now 30–40 children in the district. Her letter went on explain that with five dairies, 10 vineyards, several orchards and market gardens in the area, a school in the area would ensure “others would settle”.

After many representations to the Education Department, and with the help of local Member of Parliament, R.S. Sampson, land was resumed from North and Shute and a one-roomed school building was brought from North Kalgoorlie. The school was opened on 3 September 1923, with 16 children and Miss Mary O’Brien as teacher.





The new school required a name, and when East Maddington was not considered suitable, Mr R.S. Sampson suggested Orange Grove as there were so many orange orchards in the district and thus the name was decided.

By the mid 1940's, overcrowding became a problem. Infants and second standard were moved across the road to the Orange Grove Hall and in 1952 a new school was built in Boyle Lane. The old building was sold to the Anglican Church.

School for many children was a great social outing. Due to the acreage of properties in Orange Grove many children were unaware of the existence of others in their area until the school opened. Many children walked to school and would often have meeting places to collect different friends along the way.

## Orange Grove Hall

In 1935 Peet and Co gave a block of land to the district for the purposes of a community hall. Fundraising fancy dress dances and concerts were held at the primary school until there were enough funds to purchase an old church from Rivervale. This building was dismantled and re-erected on the corner of Maddington and Bickley Roads (now Boyle Lane), Orange Grove, by members of the Orange Grove Progress Association. The hall became a significant social hub for the area with weddings, dances, picture shows and Christmas events hosted there. The first function in this hall was the wedding of Pat Weaver to Len Wright in 1939.

As the Orange Grove School became too small in the mid 1940's, the hall was used to accommodate Infants and Standard One and Two classes. Initially the classes were held with one extra teacher but by the late 1940's two teachers were employed.

In the late 1940's through to the mid 1950's a weekly picture show at the hall enlivened the district. The seats were hard wooden benches and many people brought cushions to make it a bit more comfortable. In winter people sat with blankets around them to try and combat the biting cold.



**Image:** Orange Grove Hall, c1949 at wedding of John and Fay Oliver (image courtesy of Margaret Lefevre).

The hall was used on Saturday nights for dances usually run by the Progress Association, Football Club and later the Cricket Club and the Parents and Citizens Association club. Prior to the building of the Orange Grove Hall, dances were held in the schoolroom.

Some of the mature ladies of the district were excellent dancers and taught the teenagers. Those children too young to join in had a wonderful time during the supper interval - pulling each other along on wheat bags to polish the floor. The ladies each brought a plate of food and supper was always a lavish affair. There would be a piano player for all dances and in later years there was often a saxophone player. On special occasions a jazz trio from Cannington were hired to play.

The Catholic Church used the hall for Sunday Mass twice a month, alternating with the Anglican Church.

Every Christmas the Progress Association held a Christmas Tree event with small gifts and sweets for all the district children. In 1948, 160 children attended.

Once a year a Paddy's Market was held as a fundraiser in the hall. Cake, local produce and white elephant stalls were popular and running races were held with the course marked out on the bitumen road.

On 1 March 1978, the Orange Grove Hall, a timber frame and asbestos building, was completely destroyed by fire.

## Water

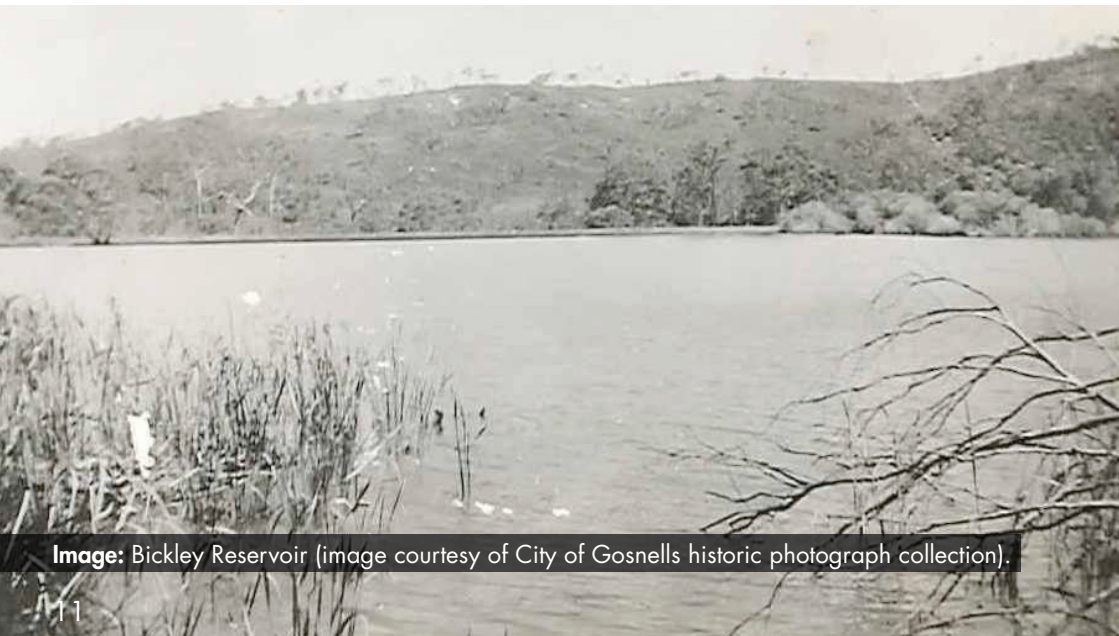
Many people operated on well water for irrigation and household use. The wells were also used as a cooling system, with homemade jellies being lowered down in buckets to set overnight.

In 1921, the Bickley Reservoir was built and added to the Metropolitan Water System.

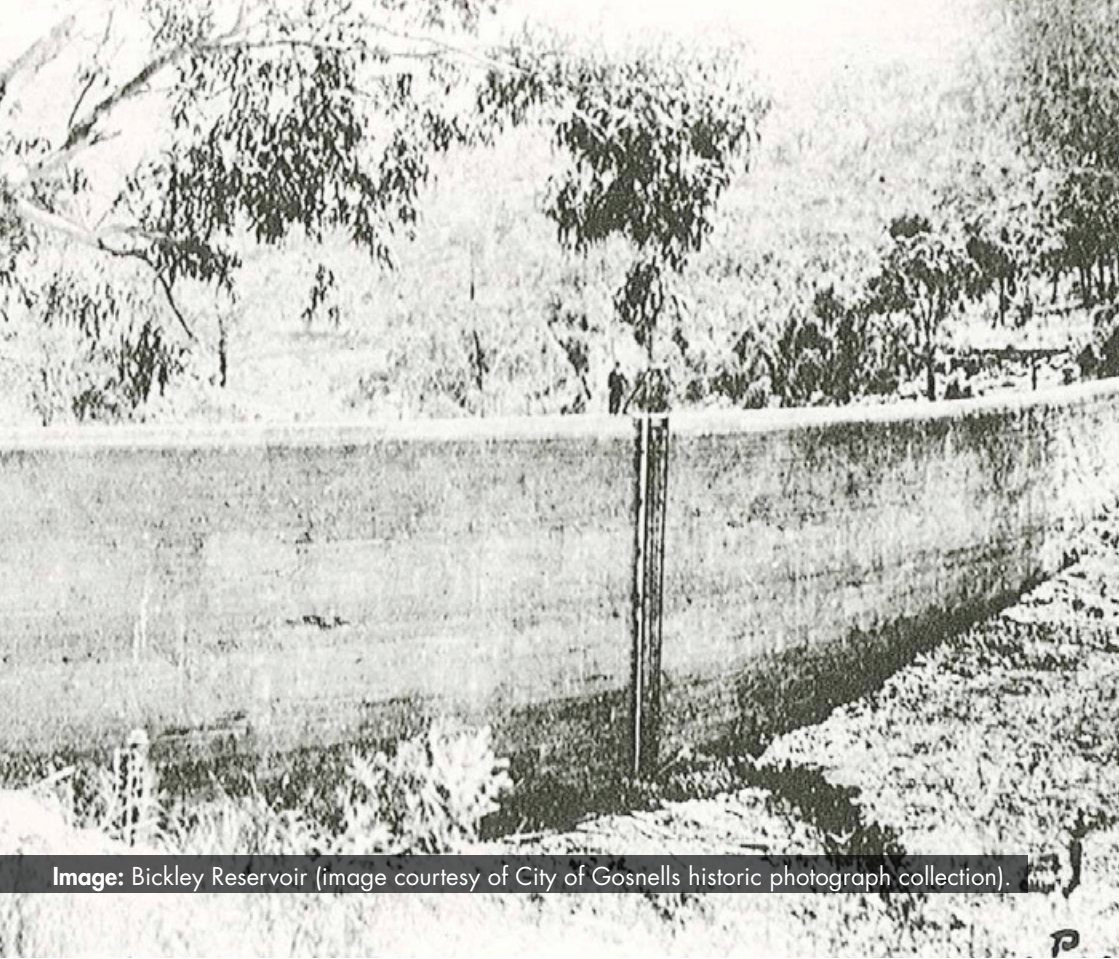
The reservoir was intended as a stop-gap measure to supplement Perth's water supply. The lower portion was designed as a barrel arch with the upper as a gravity dam. The pipe discharging the water travelled downstream for a distance before joining the main pipe from Victoria Dam.

Due to poor water quality and pressure, the dam was decommissioned in 1936. It was used for irrigation until 1944, and then for recreational purposes. At the beginning of winter every second year, dam water was released into Bickley Brook to ease the risk of flooding on the creek flats below. Bickley Brook was the source of irrigation for many of the market gardens along its length.

After World War II the Bickley Reservoir was widely used by young people for swimming in the summer months. In response to an initiative by the Government a youth camp was built to promote healthy recreation for the young people of Western Australia. In June 1945, the camp was opened by John Tonkin. At this time the camp consisted of a dining and lecture hut, kitchen, store, shower rooms and campers were accommodated in tents.



**Image:** Bickley Reservoir (image courtesy of City of Gosnells historic photograph collection).



**Image:** Bickley Reservoir (image courtesy of City of Gosnells historic photograph collection).

Later, separate staff and student dormitories were erected closer to Bickley Brook. Although some of the camp facilities were quite primitive it was very popular with youth, sporting and church groups. In 1951, the Gould League of WA started holding annual two week camps. Two children were selected from each of the metropolitan schools and taken to the camp. The 46 children were introduced to the local birdlife and nature trails were developed.

In the early 1950's, two jetties were built in the Bickley Reservoir just below the camp. They were intended to be Olympic measurements, but in 1956 when Olympians Jon Hendricks and Dawn Fraser swam record times in the reservoir, they could not be recognised as the jetties were one inch short of Olympic measurements.

## Development of services and population

In the 1930s and 1940s a weekly Friday bus service to Perth was introduced, allowing ladies to go shopping. Boans and Bairds, the two largest department stores, ran a delivery service for items which were too bulky to carry home on the bus. In the late 1940s a second bus service on Wednesday was added to accommodate the growing population in Orange Grove. Gradually a daily service was introduced for workers commuting into Perth.

Electricity was introduced in the area after World War II making the lives of housewives much easier. The purchase of a refrigerator enabled food to be stored for longer periods than was possible using the old Coolgardie safe system, or ice chests.

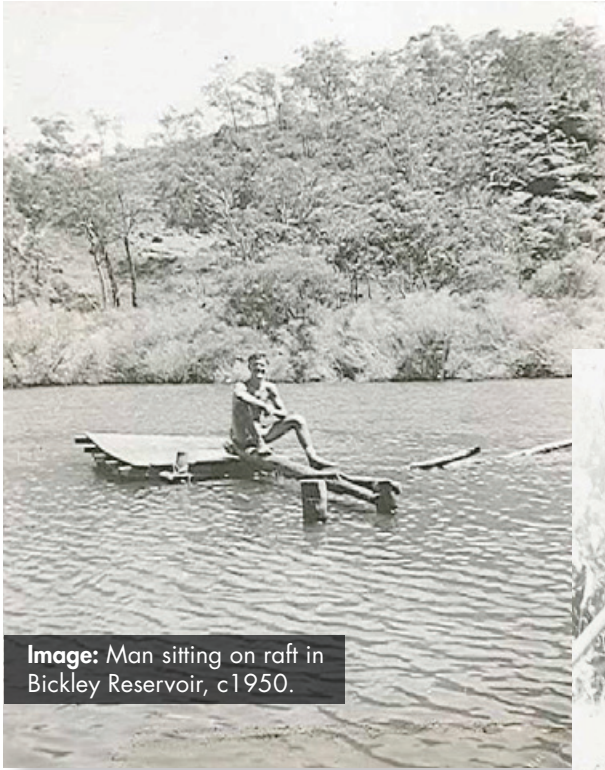
Even up to the 1950s the people of Orange Grove were quite isolated and the baker and postman would not deliver to all residences.

In 1952, to make life easier for his family, Hans Jenal installed a large box attached to a power pole at the corner of White and Hardinge Roads. This allowed mail and bread to be delivered as the delivery men would not travel the rough track up Hardinge Road to his house and so Hans walked every day to collect the goods.

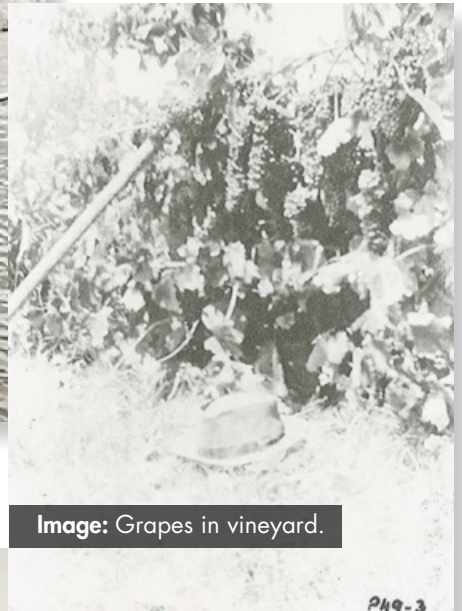
The increased post-war population in the Gosnells district meant that some of the large orchards and market gardens were subdivided into four or five acre properties. There was an associated increase in the number of sporting groups in the area including football and cricket for the men and tennis, hockey and bowls clubs open for both men and women. In Orange Grove however, a drop in intensive agriculture after 1950 saw people begin to move away and a decline in community focus. This included the disbandment of some sporting groups as members moved to larger clubs established in Gosnells, Kenwick and Maddington.

The overall population of Gosnells grew to three times its size between the end of WWII and 1966, and grew by another six times by 1986.

Some of this population found its way to the smaller blocks in Orange Grove, however most concentrated in Gosnells, Thornlie and Maddington. A number of horse properties, small private orchards and vineyards remained in Orange Grove but much of the area has changed from the predominantly agricultural environment of the 1960s.



**Image:** Man sitting on raft in Bickley Reservoir, c1950.



**Image:** Grapes in vineyard.



**Image:** Orange Grove School, 1962.

Images courtesy of City of Gosnells historic photograph collection.

# City Contacts

**Bins and rubbish enquiries** 9492 0111  
(out of hours - follow the prompts)

**Operations Centre (Council depot)**  
Waste management, street and park maintenance 9492 0111  
Recycling 9449 3312

**Ranger Services**  
Dogs, fire hazards, illegal parking, litter and off road vehicles 9397 3000  
(out of hours - follow the prompts)

**City Facilities**  
Bookings, halls, parks, sporting grounds and graffiti reporting 9397 3244

**Libraries and Heritage**  
Amherst Village Library 9498 9498  
Gosnells Knowledge Centre 9391 6000  
Kenwick Library 9397 3099  
Thornlie Library 9251 8750  
Wilkinson Homestead 9490 1575  
(City of Gosnells Museum)

**Community and Leisure**  
Community Development 9397 3121  
Volunteering 9397 3121  
Safe City (Community Safety) 9391 6022  
Leisure Services 9397 3111  
Children's Services 9397 3121  
Youth Services 9397 3121  
Seniors Services 9391 6030  
Disability Services 9391 6030  
Leisure World (gym and pool) 9251 8700  
Don Russell Performing Arts Centre 9493 4577

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