

Ashley Clarkson
Concordia University
9 August 2010



THE GATE OF REMEMBRANCE: LEST WE FORGET

The Gate of Remembrance with its formidable medieval design is a lasting tribute to army veterans buried in the National Field of Honour in Pointe-Claire. It has undergone various modifications since its inauguration in 1937, however, it still retains the same visual intensity for visitors upon entering the Field.¹ The architect was originally unknown; yet his name, Harold J. Doran, was uncovered with the help of The Last Post Fund and the City of Pointe Claire's planning and archives department. The emotional response the Gate of Remembrance evokes from the public as well as myself will be examined in detail, perhaps uncovering what the architect was trying to convey. It will also be examined how the Gate has changed over time and if its purpose remains the same, as a tribute lest we forget our soldiers buried in the Field of Honour.

The Gate of Remembrance is located in the National Field of Honour which can be found behind the Lakeview Cemetery, established in 1926. The Last Post Fund, an organization established in 1909 by Arthur Hair, purchased a piece of land from the Lakeview Cemetery in 1930.² This organization was originally conceived when a destitute soldier was buried without a dignified burial due to financial constraints. Arthur Hair "resolved that he would take it upon himself to see to it that in the future every deserving veteran would be granted a fitting burial and a hallowed resting place".³ From 1909 to 1922 the Last Post Fund operated entirely by voluntary contribution until 1922 when the Canadian government recognized "the exceptionally fine work it was doing...and placed it in receipt of an annual grant from Ottawa".⁴ Since 1909, the Last Post Fund has continued to provide veterans and peacekeepers with dignified burials, regardless of their financial situation and has since expanded across Canada. The Gate was built in 1937 at a cost of \$11,850, \$5000 of which was donated by the city of Pointe-Claire, taking 13 weeks to complete.⁵

¹ Eliane Francoeur. "Gate of Remembrance". National Field of Honour Brochure. *Last Post Fund*, 2009.

² Brenda, O'Farrell. "Then and Now: Gateway acts as Lasting Tribute". *Montreal Viewpoint*, 1994.

³ Unknown. "To Honor and Protect". *The Montreal Standard*, March 6th, 1948.

⁴ Norman Holland. "The Last Post Fund". *Municipal Review of Canada*, September, 1948, 9.

⁵ Serge, M, Durflinger. *Lest We Forget*. (Montreal: Last Post Fund, 2000) 90.

Originally the Field of Honour only had the Cross of Remembrance and the road leading to the Cross was empty (*fig 1*). The Gate, as it shall be referred to throughout the paper, was designed by Harold J. Doran, a McGill graduate, and was built by Francis King.⁶ Harold J. Doran is often recognized as the architect of Benny Farm in NDG, built in 1946-7, a social housing project for World War II veterans.⁷ Although there are not numerous similarities between these two projects, one very important affinity is the veterans themselves. The Benny Farm project illustrates how Doran continued to partake in architecture related to the military, or perhaps his work on the Gate secured his position on the Benny Farm project. The ground for the Gate was broken in the spring of 1937 by Major John. H. Molson, president of the Last Post Fund's Quebec Branch.⁸ The building is built in a medieval style using limestone blocks and is flanked by twin towers (*fig 2*). Both towers are shaped like octagons, having eight sides and are connected together by an arch. At the center of the arch there are three raised portions with the essence to a battlement design called merlons. Merlons are the sections at the top of a castle which portray the almost tooth like appearance (*fig 3*).⁹ At the center of the arch on the exterior of the building there is a concrete cast of The Last Post Fund's previous coat of arms. The building's dimensions are approximately 24 feet in height and 62 feet in width with a depth of 15 feet¹⁰. It is a two story building with a concrete foundation and a flat gravel roof with copper siding, which have now oxidized to a dull green (*fig 4*).¹¹ The interior walls are 12 to 10 inches thick in some sections and are finished with plaster. Considering it was previously the home of the groundskeeper, there are also numerous windows for light and a chimney connecting to the kitchen made with bricks.

In a newspaper article from 1936 the M.P of the Last Post fund, J.V.L.Mallete, asked for donations to fund the Gate as he said it would be the "lodging of a permanent caretaker and giving shelter to those who may go there, in cold or stormy weather" and the city of Pointe-Claire would in the end fund the project.¹² The building was inaugurated on October 6th, 1937 at 11am by the Governor General Lord Tweedsmuir (*fig 5*).¹³

From the exterior Doran's original building is still very much the same; however the interior has been remodelled quite extensively (*fig 6*). To facilitate the understanding of each tower I will refer to them as the north and south tower from the visual perspective of the photo below (*fig 7*). The bottom floor of the north tower was once the kitchen and small office space for the groundskeeper is now a bathroom (*fig 8*). The hall, which from the exterior is the arch,

⁶ Francis King. "Building Application Form". *Town of Pointe-Claire*. May 3, 1937.

⁷ Erin Sliver. "Hope. Effort. Family. The Benny Farm Community Then...and Now?" *Montreal as Palimpsest: Architecture, Community and Change*.

http://arthistory.concordia.ca/institute_site/conf08_palimpsest/papers/Erin_Silver.pdf

⁸ Ibid, 90.

⁹ Thomas Jeffrey. "Merlon-Battlements". Castles of Wales. <http://www.castlewales.com/merlon.html> (accessed July 17, 2010)

¹⁰ Francis King. "Building Application Form". *Town of Pointe-Claire*, May 3, 1937.

¹¹ Ibid, May 3, 1937.

¹² Unknown. "Proposed Gate of Remembrance". *The Lakeshore Press*, Vol XIV, No 14, Pointe-Claire, July 24, 1936 <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=WIVIxizkzXoC&dat=19360724&printsec=frontpage>.

¹³ "Governor General to Open Gate of Remembrance". *The Lakeshore Press*, Vol XV, No. 20, Pointe-Claire, October 1st, 1937. <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=WIVIxizkzXoC&dat=19371001&printsec=frontpage>.

connects the former living room and bedroom. The hall has been enlarged as it was originally split into three rooms: a bathroom, a spare room and the bell room (*fig 9*). Doran incorporated a bell room into the building to be rung as a soldier to be interred passed through the Gate. The bell was removed in 1998 replaced by a stained glass window by Montreal artist Nicole Gascon, a gift from the Royal Canadian Legion (*fig 10*). The stain glass window depicts a soldier in battle and allows for the building to have a cathedral ambiance. The original purpose of the room on the bottom level of the south tower is often debated. An engineer who worked on the building explained how during renovations he found the remnants of a bathroom¹⁴. In 1936 *The Lakeshore Press* explained how the Gate would be used to give shelter to visitors, so perhaps this was the public waiting room.¹⁵ In 1973 this room was converted into a small chapel which can seat approximately 25 people. Both towers have basement levels which have since been renovated due to increasing weather erosion over the years. Although the building has undergone various modifications, does it still fulfill the purpose or instill the perceptions and feelings Doran set out to achieve in his architectural design? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to uncover the feelings of visitors to the Field and my own feelings upon exploring the Gate.

It was a beautiful sunny day with a cerulean blue sky as I set out to uncover the history of the Gate. The Gate sits imposingly at the top of the Lakeview hill, a symbol of the military. Doran designed the building in a medieval style, reminiscent of a Babylonian castle gatehouse because of the flat roof and twin tower design. Doran may have also been influenced by the Romanesque revivals which were brought to America by British architects. The Romanesque revival is often characterised by stone walls and the rounded arch.¹⁶ Doran's original design was the headline of a local newspaper, and the image illustrates how he was strongly influenced by the gothic revival with its distinguishable spire roof, a common characteristic of the gothic revival (*fig 11*).¹⁷ His design is very significant because a castle gatehouse is a symbol of peace and safety, as travellers would enter the Gate walls and the portcullis would descend keeping them safe (*fig 12*). I imagine that Doran was trying to convey the idea that as soldiers passed through the Gate to their final resting place; they would forever be at peace, safe within the walls of the Gate. Furthermore, as I passed under the Gate, the peace and calm of the National Field of Honour was unquestionable, as the only sounds were the songs of birds and the gentle sound of the wind rustling through the foliage. There are two steel doors at the back of the Gate and with the consent of Francis Lamarre, manager of the National Field of Honour; I was permitted full access to the interior of the building. As I entered the north tower, previously the home of the groundskeeper, I noted the modern changes to the floors, walls and windows. This room was originally the kitchen and, although it has now been converted into a bathroom, the remnants and ambiance of the kitchen can still be found. On

¹⁴ Francis Lamarre. "Interview on the Gate of Remembrance". *National Field of Honour*, July 17, 2010.

¹⁵ Unknown. "Proposed gate of Remembrance". *The Lakeshore Press*, Vol XIV, No 14, Pointe-Claire, July 24, 1936 <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=WIVIXizkzXoC&dat=19360724&printsec=frontpage>. (Accessed July 18th, 2010).

¹⁶ Chuck LaChiusa. "Romanesque Revival". *Buffalo as an Architectural Museum* <http://www.buffaloah.com/a/archsty/rom/index.html#rom> (accessed August 1st, 2010).

¹⁷ World Lindo. "Gothic architecture". http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Gothic_architecture (accessed August 1st, 2010).

the outside of the building the pipe for the stove and the chimney are still visible from the roof (*fig 4*). The staircase to the basement felt narrow and restrictive, and led to a basement which had been modified using poured concrete. As I ascended the stairs to the top floor I was once again afflicted by the constricting feeling. However, the stairs were well lit and the restricting feeling was probably a necessity due to the amount of space Doran had to design with. Once I reached the top floor I found the amount of windows produced an abundance of light. The hallway, which originally connected the living room to the bedroom, has a church ambiance as the light spills through the small, humble windows. Yet, I had to consider that the hall was once split into three rooms and so some of these windows were once shrouded within a room. As I stood in the hall I tried to imagine how small it would have been and where each door would have opened. As the hall is not very wide, I believe it was a very narrow pathway in the original design and most likely only one person could manoeuvre at a time. Demolishing the three rooms is not the only modification which took place in this section. A stain glass window was also installed in the site of the old bell. I found the bell to be an intriguing addition to the original design as it must have evoked tremendous emotion as the veterans passed through the gates, marching to its sombre tone. Unfortunately, the reality of the bell was that it demanded considerable upkeep which resulted in its removal. That being said, the stain glass window by Montreal artist Nicole Gascon, which now replaces the bell, is of equal distinction, paying attention to specific details such as the emotions on the soldier's face as he wistfully treads across the barren battlefield. One very interesting modification to what was originally the master bedroom is the barricade of a spiral staircase (*fig 13*). A small alcove rests where the staircase once was and can be seen from the chapel below as well as the basement level, as it connected all the floors for easier access. Considering I could not get to the chapel from the now barricaded spiral staircase, I decided to make my way around the building using the exterior entrance to the chapel in the south tower. The room in the south tower was not always a chapel, but upon entering I had difficulty imagining what its original purpose was. This room is quaint and I came to the feasible conclusion that it was either a waiting room or reception for visitors to the Field. This room was converted into a chapel in 1972, yet no one was exactly sure of its original purpose. However, Mr. Lamarre explained how the engineer who worked on the modification found the remnants of an old bathroom, which contributes to my theory of a waiting room.¹⁸ The chapel has an air of sentiment and tranquility and its podium allows for people to speak of their lost loved ones. As I reflected in a pew, I found the room was perfectly lit and the pictures of Vimy Ridge, Dieppe cemetery and the Unknown grave of a Canadian soldier in Ottawa were perfect reminders that this was a chapel for veterans (*fig 14*).

When examining the hardwood floors of the chapel, which appeared to be red oak with a gloss finish, I noticed a trap door which was originally connected to the spiral staircase (*fig 15*). Although the descent was ominous, using a small wooden ladder I lowered myself into the chapel basement. The basement has been completely redone using poured concrete, due to flooding as Mr. Lamarre explained how it was slowly sinking into the ground. The most

¹⁸ Francis Lamarre. "Interview on the Gate of Remembrance". *National Field of Honour*, July 17, 2010.

interesting focal point of the basement was the large black vault which really drew my full attention because of its imposing size (*fig 16*). The purpose of the vault is also debated; perhaps it contained the archives of the Last Post Fund. Serge Durlinger, a scholar who wrote a book on The Last Post Fund, explained that “important archival material related to the early decades of the Fund’s operations, which had been at the Gate of Remembrance at the Field of Honour, had deteriorated or been damaged beyond use.”¹⁹ When I examined the door of the vault I noted that there was erosion on the bottom corners and side, which could have damaged the archives if they were located within the vault, however this is all speculation (*fig 17*). Additionally, this basement had a garage door for the groundskeeper to park his vehicle as it was necessary for the groundskeeper to safely store his vehicle. However, it is now hard to imagine that there once was a garage door as it was removed and was replaced with a concrete wall and a rectangular steel window (*fig 18*).

From this dark and dreary basement I decided it would be a pleasant contrast to visit the roof of the Gate which Mr. Lamarre graciously allowed me to access. The entrance to the roof is only accessible by a ladder on the second floor through a ceiling hatch (*fig 19*). The view from the roof is very beautiful, overlooking a plethora of lush, green, and meticulously kept verdure and I was once again struck by the deep tranquility of the cemetery grounds (*fig 20*). The National Field of Honour does not have the appearance we are accustomed to in a cemetery. The grave stones are flush with the ground to symbolize how all soldiers are equal in death. Consequently, I felt this made it more appealing to the eye as it appears more serene than a cemetery with large headstones, like its neighbour, the Lakeview cemetery. I was intrigued by the fact that the canons face the entrance of the Gate, as it foreshadows the point I made about Doran being inspired by a Gatehouse to which the canons are the defence. In addition, the canons, which are the first objects seen upon entering the Gate, further exemplify the military presence of the building. While uncovering the history of the Gate and exploring the Gate itself I always kept in mind the rich military history it represented. I felt that this verse below captured the importance of the cemetery and how the building is of equal importance because of its connection to the intricate history of The Last Post Fund,

“Their names shall now be carved in gold!
War paeans sung, their deeds extolled!
Their bones interred, not like of old
In Potter’s Field!”²⁰

Potter’s Field by definition is a “place for the burial of unknown or indigent persons”.²¹ The Gate marks the entrance to this important historical site, which since 2009 has been designated

¹⁹ Serge, M, Durlinger. *Lest We Forget*. (Montreal: Last Post Fund, 2000) 245.

²⁰ Military Cemeteries. “To Honor and Protect”. *The Montreal Standard*, March 1948, 2.

²¹ Free Dictionary. “Potter’s Field”. *Farlex*. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/potter%27s+field> (accessed July 30th, 2010).

a National Historic Site by the Boards of Canada (*fig 21*).²² Doran created a strong military symbol and Mrs. Wanda Widawska Rewers, a visitor to the National Field of Honour, was kind enough to offer her perspective on the Gate, to further explore the message it conveys. Mrs. Wanda Widawska Rewers, whose late husband is buried in the Field of Honour, explained how she misses him dearly and that the Gate gives her a feeling of strength and peace when she views it, and she always feels safe and tranquil once she passes through its walls into the National Field of Honour.²³

The Gate of Remembrance is an important part of Canadian military history. It is a monument erected to instill the importance of Canadian soldiers to all civilians. The cemetery as a whole is a place devoted to the memory and actions of the soldiers that fought or aided in peacekeeping missions for Canada. The building has become the symbol and one of the distinguishing marks for the National Field of Honour and hopefully it will continue to persevere through time. Although a bell is no longer rung for the soldiers, the Gate stands as a lasting tribute to its namesake that they shall be remembered.

²²Parks Canada “The Last Post Fund: The National Field of Honour”. *Historic Sites and Monument Boards of Canada*. June, 2009.

²³ Wanda Widawska Rewers. “Interview about the Field of Honour”. *National Field of Honour*. Pointe-Claire, QC, taken July 02, 2010.

PHOTO GALLERY



(Fig 1-Space on the road before the construction of the Gate)





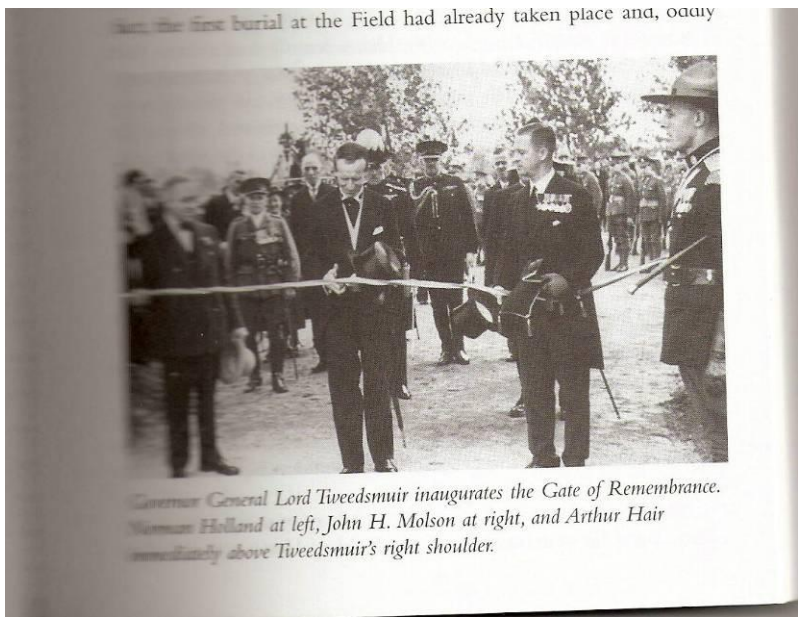
(Fig 2- The Gate of Remembrance in 1937 and 2010 and the Last Post Fund previous coat of arms)



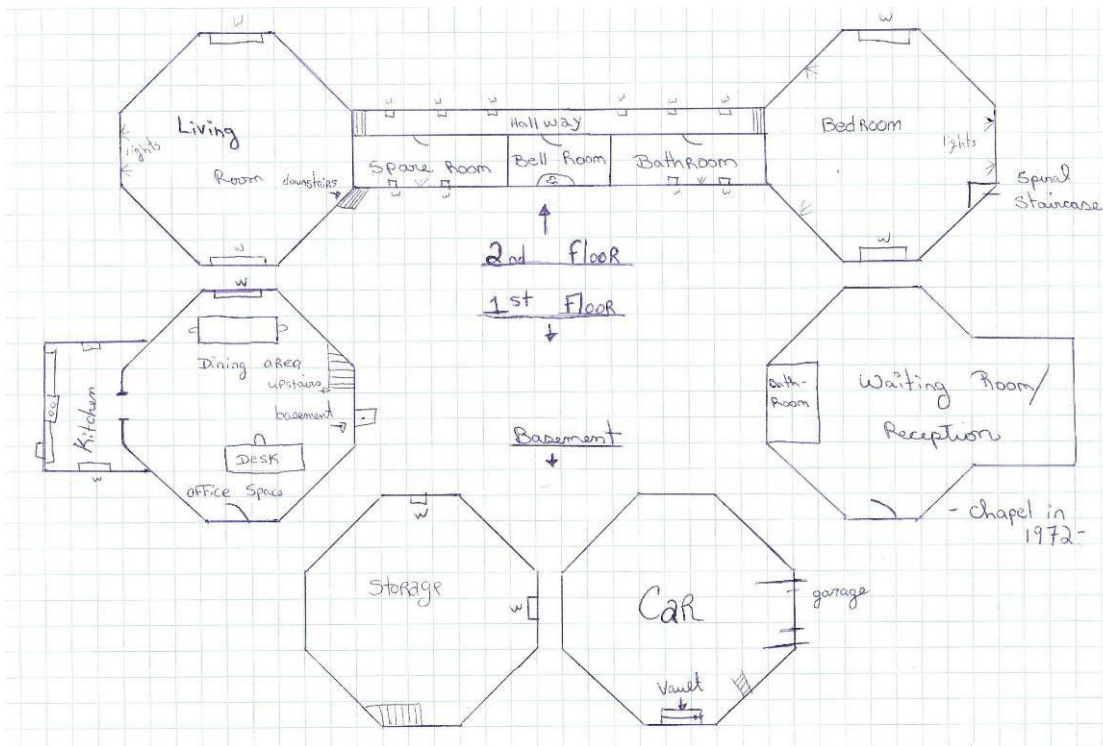
(Fig 3—A variation of a merlons, although not quite so tooth cut)



(Fig 4- Gravel and tar roof with copper siding)



(Fig 5-Governer General Lord Tweedsmuir inauguration in 1937)



(Fig 6-Rough sketch of the interior of the Gate)



(Fig 7-View of South and North tower as it shall be referred to throughout the paper for easier understanding)



(Fig 8- Remodelled North Tower, where the kitchen used to be)



(Fig 9- The hallway and windows on the top floor)



(Fig 10- The previous bell and the new stain glass window by Nicole Gascon)

The Lakeshore Press
 Lachine--FORTNIGHTLY--Ste. Annes
 Vol. XIV. No. 15 Pointe Claire, July 24, 1936 Price 5 cents

PROPOSED "GATE OF REMEMBRANCE"
 (Subject to Modification)
 Read article on page eight of this issue.

**PIPER HENDERSON
 ANSWERS LAST CALL**

Had Lengthy Career as a Soldier,
 Settling in Valois Four
 Years Ago

George Henderson, a resident of Broadview Ave. Valois, passed away at the Lachine General Hospital on July 1st, and was buried in the Last Post Fund plot, Pointe Claire.

He was a member of the Pipe Band of the 5th Royal Highlanders of Canada, and was in demand on various occasions, always giving freely of his talent. He participated at the Quebec Tercentenary in 1908, and went overseas with the 21st Battalion C.F.F. also with the 15th Battalion 48th Highlanders of Toronto.

On returning from overseas, he was employed by the Government in the Customs Dept., Montreal.

The deceased was a Freemason, being an old old member of Argyle Lodge A.F. & A.M., G.L.Q., No. 65, also a member of Royal Arch Chapter in

(Fig 11-Doran's original design)



(Fig 12- Descending Portcullis)



(Fig 13-An example of a spiral staircase which would have been found in the Gate)



(Fig 13- Pictured is the alcove where the spiral staircase was once located.)



(Fig 14- The Chapel and the photo memorials)



(Fig 15-Trap door leading to basement and the remnants of the staircase circle)



(Fig 16- The Vault)



(Fig 17-The erosion on the vault door)



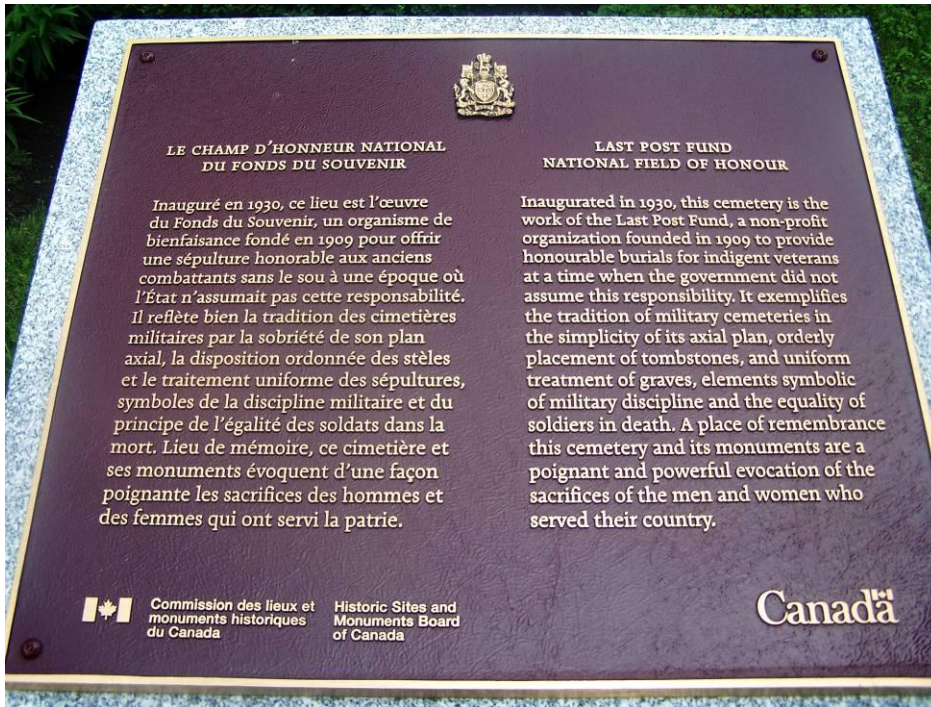
(Fig 18- The window where the garage door was originally)



(Fig 19-Ceiling hatch to access the roof)



(Fig 20-The view of the National Field of Honour from the roof)



(Fig 21- Recognition by Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 2009)

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