

# Personal Memories of Falkirk Baptist Church



by Hugh McClenaghan

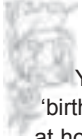
# Personal Memories



Hugh McClenaghan

'Personal Memories Of Falkirk Baptist Church' was written by Hugh McClenaghan as a series of articles for the church magazine *The Messenger* between 1994 and 1996. Hugh McClenaghan joined the church in 1926 and was made a Life Deacon in 1983 after 50 years service on the Deacon's Court. Hugh was predeceased by his wife, Isa, who died in July 1992. Hugh died in April 1996, aged 81 years.

# Personal Memories



You and I have something in common : a 'birthday'. I was born on 19th September 1914 at home in Ladysmill, Falkirk. However, I have another 'birthday'. I will explain if you read on. In September 1914 War Clouds were hovering over the country, and my father volunteered for army service with the Royal Army Medical Corp. Mother and I were very fortunate and glad when dad was 'demobed'. Shortly afterwards we moved to a new home in Glebe Street, Falkirk. By this time I was attending Victoria School, about 1 mile from my home. Glebe Street then was a very busy place. There was Falkirk Burgh buildings, the Fire Station, a Market Place, and the YMCA at the corner, as well as the houses and shops. I was always home quickly from school when animals were for sale at the market. When I was 8 years old we moved to a new address at Roman Drive in Camelon. At that time my parents were members of St James' Church. Because of the distance, they were asked to come to the Baptist Church by relatives, who were already members. They were both baptised and became members of Falkirk Baptist Church in 1923. However, my sister and I attended Sunday School at the Irving Church in Camelon. I have many happy memories of those days.

Christmas time was always a very happy time. In 1924 at the Christmas Treat I took part with all the children doing their 'party piece'. At the end of the programme the minister gave a vote of thanks to the children and the teachers. However the superintendent of the Sunday School said, "There is one item still to come. We must give God thanks for a wonderful evening. One of our Sunday School boys will now close the evening by singing 'The Day Thou Gavest'". Yes, I made my 'singing debut' that night. I give God thanks for that night. I will never forget it.



# Personal Memories

## Outreach Mission

At that time in the church, the size of the Deacon's Court was under review and a special church meeting was called where it was agreed to increase the number serving on the Court. The result of the church election was that Mr A Nicol and my father Mr W McClenaghan were duly elected, bringing the number of deacons up to 12. Also in 1924, the church decided to hold a two week 'Outreach Mission', the guest speaker being Rev W D Dunn. It certainly made an impact on the life of the church, especially to two young people, Alison Scott and myself. We both accepted Jesus as our Saviour on 13th November 1924. Hence my second 'birthday'. After careful nursing by both our parents and the minister, Rev Graham Lyle, we were both baptised and received into membership of the church in October 1926. If you cannot say that you have had a 'second birthday' then do not put off until tomorrow. Come along to the church and you will be made most welcome.

In September 1926 Rev Graham Lyle informed the Deacons Court that he was resigning from the pastorate in October, as he had received a call from Cambridge Street Baptist Church in Glasgow. In October the church called Rev Fred Cawley who, after a short time of thought and prayer, accepted and became the minister of our church in December 1926. At this time, the church had a good number of energetic young people of which I was privileged to be a part. The church had a Youth Fellowship that was outgoing, a strong Boy Scout Troop, and a healthy Girls Guildry of which Isa was a member. By this time I was a member of our Scouts (52nd Stirlingshire Troop), and our Scoutmaster was Mr Wilfred Smith. I took part in all the various Scout activities, and we had a strong football team of which I was a member (with a left foot to be feared!). After one such match, our trainer noticed that my

# Personal Memories

left knee was badly swollen. There was no change after a few weeks so I had to get my whole leg in plaster. It was almost a year before it finally came off. My football career was finished! During that time I was unable to attend school, so my school chums brought me lessons each day. But my education was slightly blighted.

## Patternmaker

When I reached the school leaving age of 14 I started looking for employment. Early in 1929 my father, on returning home from work, gave me some good news. He told me I was to go to the Foundry and have an interview with the Foreman Patternmaker. This news was given to him by one of the deacons in the church, John Wright, who was a Foreman Moulder. On arrival at my interview I was asked if I could count and read a drawing. After replying that I could, I was told to start work on the following Monday morning. John Wright, when coming to the Patternshop on business, always made a point of giving me some encouragement. He once said to me, "Jesus is with you always. I trust that you will remember that as you grow older. He will never forsake you." Early in 1930, it was intimated at a church service that John Wright was seriously ill. A few months later he was taken home to be with his Lord. To the church it was a great loss, but at his home it was a greater loss. Our prayers went out to both his wife and family. There were five daughters. The three eldest were working, the youngest was still at school, and the other, Isa, was at home with her mother. At that time my father was their deacon. As I look back, there was a gradual closeness developing between the families.

# Personal Memories

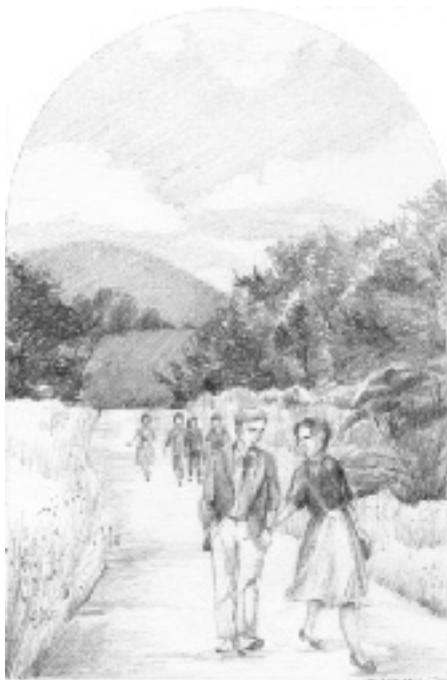
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“I Will Build My Church”

## Youth Fellowship

I must record that there was a time, when I was between the ages of 16 and 18, that my faith wavered a bit, although I still attended church and Youth Fellowship. Then, in 1932, two important things happened for me in the church. I became a member of the church choir, and the church Youth Leader, John Furnage, encouraged me to take a more active role in the Youth Fellowship. The Youth Fellowship met in the small hall after the evening service and everyone was encouraged to take part in leadership, in Bible study, in speaking and giving testimony, in playing musical instruments, and just in helping each other. We also visited other church Youth Fellowships. I remember on one occasion



# Personal Memories

we visited Denny Baptist Youth Fellowship. After the meeting we all decided that as it was such a lovely evening we would walk home. Some of us got a bit scattered on the way. Looking back, it was the beginning of a relationship between Isa Wright and myself which gradually became stronger.

In April 1933 the church decided that the Deacon's Court required strengthening, and an election was called. The result was that I, with others, were duly elected. So at the age of almost 19 I took my place very humbly on the Deacon's Court. My Lord carried me through. The work of the Deacon's Court was organised methodically. This included district visitation on a regular basis, and the appointing of two deacons for each Church Organisation in order to give reports at the Deacon's Court. The order of this was changed each year. I remember that Isa was one of the first people I interviewed regarding baptism and church membership.

## Sunday School Trip

I remember an unusual incident occurred at the 1934 Sunday School trip. The trip was always well supported by both parents and members. As usual, the boys were playing football, but a big boy came along and wanted to play and joined in the game. Unfortunately he was injured while playing and broke his ankle. And so the Rev Fred Cawley, our minister, was off the church for three months! The next week Mrs Cawley asked me to go to the Manse. The minister wanted me to go to the library for him to collect and return books. I was more than happy to be of service to him. It was around this time that the minister attained his PhD from Edinburgh University. He left Falkirk Baptist in 1935 to become the minister of Denmark Place Baptist Church in London.

# Personal Memories

In December 1935 our new minister, Rev William Paterson, was inducted. He came from Lochgilphead Baptist Church, and his salary was £250 per annum. However there was one 'snag'. Since he was unmarried he said he didn't need a Manse, so the Manse was let for almost two years, while he rented a house in Comely Park. Around this time the church also agreed to form a branch of 'Girls Auxiliary' under the leadership of Miss Alison Scott (remember the wee girl who, in 1924, became a Christian the same time as I did).

In 1938 I was unemployed, but then managed to get employment in Kilwinning as a patternmaker for a year. The church decided that I should retain office as a deacon, as the Deacon's Court was short of personnel. Mr John Furnage was elected onto the Court. We both had many happy memories of our Youth Fellowship days together. When I returned back to work in Falkirk in 1938, everyone could see that War Clouds were again hovering over the country. In the event of the military taking over empty property the minister, Rev William Paterson, agreed to occupy the Manse.

## Secretary

The church treasurer, Andrew Balfour Gray, retired in 1939 after over thirty years service to the church during which he served both as secretary and treasurer. Shortly after his presentation he was taken home to be with his Lord. A special church meeting was held where the secretary, Mr J Scott, said he would also take over the position of treasurer until an appointment was made, as long as he was assisted. The church asked me and after much thought and prayer I agreed. The following year my father was proposed by the deacons to be the church treasurer, which the church unanimously accepted. In July of that year our secretary, Mr J Scott, was forced to retire from this

# Personal Memories

position due to health reasons. The Deacon's Court agreed that as I had been assisting with both positions, would I be prepared to take on the secretaryship. At this point I must say that Isa and myself were seriously thinking about our future together, and so we talked the matter over. Isa's advice was, "It is the Lord's work, and if I can be of any help I'll willingly give all I can". My parents had mixed feelings, especially as my father had just accepted the position of church treasurer. I asked the deacons if they would give me some time and I would give my answer at the August Deacon's Meeting. At the Deacon's Court in August I accepted the position of Church secretary. I recalled the hymn "Ask the Saviour to help you, He will carry you through". And He did. Many times.

## Church Choir

Early in the summer of 1940, the church choir and friends had an Evening Drive. We stopped at Balloch on the shore of Loch Lomond. Some went for a stroll after the meal, however six of us went to the small jetty where there were rowing boats for hire. So off we set for one of the islands on the loch, Rev William and Mrs Paterson (Alison Scott) in one boat, and Isa, myself, Isa's sister May and her husband Jack in the other. We had a look around when we got there, before returning back to the boats. Mr & Mrs Paterson arrived back first at the jetty, but our boat seemed to be at a standstill, and we were having a difficult journey. By this time, darkness was beginning to fall. At the jetty the choir members were standing there, looking into the semi-darkness, silently praying for our safe return. The boat-hirer, however, was anything but pleased, although eventually even he became quieter. One of the choir members then prayed, asking God to bring the boat home. We did arrive safely back at the jetty. The boat-hirer said he didn't



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## Personal Memories

think we'd make it back, and asked about 'praying to God'. He also gave us money to buy music for the choir. Going home, we were all very thankful, and praised God by singing 'Great Is Thy Faithfulness'.

In September, the minister called a special Deacon's Court meeting. After a short time of prayer, the minister stated he had the following intimation to make :- "I have received and accepted a unanimous call to George Street Baptist Church



in Paisley". He would be taking up his new charge at the end of October. We were all taken aback, but had to accept it. So now, what about the new secretary? I was in at the deep end. But it was true what I have already mentioned - "Ask - He will carry you through". My first steps were to form a Vacancy Committee from the Deacon's Court and church, arrange pulpit supply for a few months, and encourage members to be willing to give hospitality during the vacancy. At this time Isa and I decided to get married. I had a wee word with her mum and the answer was 'yes'. At that time Isa was working in a grocers shop, Liptons Ltd, in Vicar Street. We arranged to meet during her dinner hour and went to a jewellers. We became officially engaged in the shop and were congratulated by a few customers. This was on 4th October 1940. My employment as a pattern-maker meant that I wasn't

# Personal Memories

required for military service, but we both had fire-watching duties twice a week. Isa was in the High Street, and I was stationed at the Royal Infirmary.

Towards the end of 1940 there was a special meeting of the church Vacancy Committee. Also present was the Baptist Union secretary, Dr Scott. He told us of ministers available in regard to settlement. The Committee agreed that we invite the Rev Matthew Cook of Perth West Baptist Church in January 1941 to preach with regard to the vacancy. The Committee met again in February, and after a full discussion we agreed to recommend to the church that we send a formal call to Rev Matthew Cook to become the minister of our church. I received a letter from Mr Cook accepting the call to Falkirk, and so I informed Mr Wilson as to when the military could vacate the Manse which they did in early March. I met with Mr Wilson with regard to any damage done in the Manse. After much haggling I agreed to accept £35. At the time of coming to our church, our new minister's family were on War Service. His eldest son, Ernest, was in the Royal Navy, and his twin sons Gerald and Eric were in the army. Both were Prisoners of War in Germany, however both returned safely at the end of the War.

During 1941 air-raids were always imminent. In the Clydebank area a munitions factory was hit. Many lost their lives. We as a church lost John Furmage, a very loyal and valuable member. As a church we expressed our deepest sympathy to his wife, Peggy, and young family.

## Church Railings

Have you ever wondered why the railings around the church are only on one side of the building? They used to, of course, go all the way round, but in December 1941 I, as church secretary, received



“Ask  
the  
Saviour  
to help  
you,  
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carry  
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through”

“I Will Build My Church”

## Personal Memories

an official letter from the government saying that they were requisitioning metal from all public buildings and the church was required to hand over our railings on the Orchard Street side of the church, as a contribution to the war effort. The reason the railings on the Weir Street side of the church were left was because Weir Street was in direct use for cattle going straight from market in Newmarket Street to the slaughter house in Kerse lane. So the railings had to be left intact.

Due to the 'blackout', the Evening Service was held in the afternoon at 4 o'clock, and the Sunday School at 2 o'clock. Even though the church choir practice couldn't continue, the singing at the church services never diminished in any way. But in early 1942 the military officially handed back the small hall, cloak-room and vestry, as we now had a settled ministry, and in June of that year the large hall and kitchen were handed back with a note of thanks and a cheque for £313-13-0. During 1942 the war continued. We had church members in military service, others in war work, and various in voluntary organisations. Although sometimes not easy, our church work continued. “Ask the Saviour to help you, He will carry you through”. Looking back, in many ways it brought the membership very close to one another. In October 1942, Isa and I were married by our minister, Rev Matthew Cook. I remember a remark made by an older member of the church that the Youth Fellowship should be renamed a 'Matrimonial Agency'! The reception was held in Lea Park tea room in Laurieston Road. Everyone escorted us to the station, the train came, and off we went to Stonehaven, where we stayed for four days.

With the handing back of the halls, nobody was more pleased than our choirmaster, Alex Braid, now we could have a weekly choir practice. At that time the members of the choir were a variety of ages,

# Personal Memories

which was healthy. In some ways it was a get-together. We used our singing and speaking talents in various places of worship. The choir at that time had around 24 members, and the platform then was smaller than it is now. When the mid-week choir practice started up again, Alex Braid gave us a short word of welcome and informed us we had a few engagements. It was agreed that a fund be started in order to purchase music. Miss Elizabeth Chesnut and myself were to be responsible as joint-treasurers of the fund. The choir led the praise at the Christmas services that year, which was warmly appreciated by both members and friends. After a very busy winter season, the choir decided to have an Evening Drive in May 1943. We left by bus at 6 pm, and after viewing some highland scenery we stopped at a hotel on the shore of Loch Lomond. Some of the guests in the hotel discovered that this large company was a church choir, and requested from us that we render a few favourite choir pieces. Assembling outside, over-looking the 'bonny banks', we sang a number of songs including 'All In The April Evening', and 'How Great Thou Art'. The guests requested a Negro spiritual, and we sang 'Steal Away'. Did we enjoy our evening? Well, we kept singing almost all the way home.

## United Choir

Early in 1943 the Baptist Union sent an official notice to all churches proposing the setting up of a '30,000 Guinea Fund', which would help churches currently receiving financial help from the Union and help maintain ministerial stipends in line with inflation. The Stirlingshire and Clackmannanshire Baptist Association decided that as well as each church organising their own effort, the Association would also organise an event with Mr James Taylor of Larbert being responsible for this. In January



## Personal Memories

1944 Alex Braid informed the Deacons Court that James Taylor had been in touch with himself and the choirmasters in the Baptist churches at Larbert, Denny, and Bo'ness, about forming a United Choir which would seek engagements with the proceeds going to the 30,000 Guinea Fund. Isa and I always felt privileged to be part of the activities of the choir. Isa's four sisters, Jenny, May, Melville, and Betty were also members of the choir at various times. All churches unanimously agreed to the formation of the United Choir. Alex Braid was choirmaster, and Miss E McDonald from Larbert the accompanist. Although only set up for the 30,000 Guinea Fund, the United Choir carried on until 1950.

The following will make you smile, but it's true. A quarterly business meeting of the church was held in June 1945. I, as secretary, read out the minutes of the previous church meeting and all agreed. Then all foregoing business was carried out and all agreed, with no problems. Why? Because no members turned up! Only the deacons were present. I put this down to the fact that it was a wet night and the Glasgow Orpheus Choir were in the Town hall.

At the church Annual General Meeting in February 1946 the following recommendation came from the Deacon's Court :-

- 1) That the church have a complete election of deacons.
- 2) That women were eligible to serve on the Deacon's Court.
- 3) That all candidates must be baptised and nominated by at least two church members.

The result of the election of deacons was that Miss G McLeay, Mrs W Adam, Mr A Braid, Mr E Reid, Mr W Jarvie, Mr W McClenaghan, Mr J Baillie, Mr

# Personal Memories

A Smith, Mr J Kennedy, and myself were duly elected. Grace McLeay, one of the first women deacons, didn't feel fully suited to the role of deacon, and resigned after one year. She did, however, give very faithful service to the church which included leading the junior choir. Two years later there was another election of deacons, with Miss J Black, Mr J Hunter, Miss Helen Kennedy and Mrs Isa McClenaghan being added to the Deacons Court. The church also unanimously appointed Mr J Kennedy as a life deacon. And in 1950 the church made Mr W Jarvie and my father life deacons.

## JJ Brown

When the minister was on holiday, I had to arrange pulpit supply. One person who was a 'must' for pulpit supply when he came to Falkirk was Jack (JJ) Brown, who was the minister at Erith Baptist Church in Kent. Jack's father was the Town Missionary, and the Town Missionary's house was next door to our manse. Jack was a member of our church before going to Spurgeon's Baptist College in London in 1937 to train for the ministry. He married one of our members, Miss Margaret Henderson. The church always looked forward to his visit. And on Rev Matthew Cook's 10th anniversary of his pastorate in Falkirk, another former member of the church, Rev Fred Price of Kirkintilloch Baptist, was invited as the guest speaker.

In September 1953 the minister, Rev Matthew Cook, paid tribute to one of our life deacons, Mr J Kennedy, for his many years service to his Lord and to our church. A letter of sympathy was sent to his wife and four daughters, Nancy, Helen, Chrissie and Mary who each, in their own way, also gave loyal service. The following year, in September,

# Personal Memories

the deacons received a letter from the minister. *“Owing to my health, I find it impossible to carry on the ministry here in Falkirk. Therefore I would like to retire at the end of October. I trust the church will understand and accept it. However, we will still be staying in the area, and we would like to retain our membership here, and would be prepared to assist the church in any way until the end of the vacancy.”* The church agreed to this. Rev Matthew Cook stayed in the district until his death in 1958.

## Billy Graham Campaign

At a church meeting in January 1955, the church sent an official call to Rev John Lyons of Victoria Place Baptist Church in Glasgow. He agreed to come after the All Scotland (Billy Graham) Campaign in the Kelvin Hall, and his induction to Falkirk Baptist was on 8th & 9th May 1955. By the late 1950s, our Youth Fellowship had grown in numbers to 18 girls and 6 boys under the leadership of Bill Murray. For the last few years they had been very active in deputation work and were a credit to the church. Bill Murray was also part of the committee set up to produce a monthly news letter for the church, *The Messenger*, along initially with Sandy Greig and John Furrage, the first edition being September 1961.

In 1961 our organist and choirmaster, Alex Braid, died. His long and faithful service was greatly missed. I, as secretary, wrote a letter to his wife Peggy, and daughters Ann & Margaret, expressing our Christian sympathy. And my father, due to failing health, felt it was becoming more difficult for him to continue his position as church treasurer and retired from this position in 1961, having served for 21 years. Mrs A Blair became our new organist in February 1962, however she resigned later that year being replaced by Mr Hume Waddell.

# Personal Memories

## Treasurer

Sandy Greig, one of our new deacons, started his studies at the Baptist Theological College in Glasgow in June 1963, in preparation for the ministry. He had come to our church, along with his sister Ann, in 1956 from Warley Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. Also in the summer of 1963, two of our young people, Tom Taylor & Wilma Murray, were married. I was privileged to be their first deacon. John McGechaen, who had taken over the position of treasurer from my father in 1961, relinquished this position in February 1964 since he was moving to Dundee because of promotion at his work. On 1st March 1964, I resigned as church secretary, a position I had held since 1940, to become the treasurer. Also at this time, one of our new deacons Tom Taylor became the new leader of the Boys Brigade, and Wilma Taylor accepted the appointment as the new Captain of the Girls Life Brigade in November that year, taking over the role from Helen Kennedy who had to retire due to her health. One of our other young people, John Furmage, took over the leadership of the Youth Fellowship from Bill Murray.

## Lochgilphead

In June 1966 the minister, Mr Lyons, informed the Deacons Court that Sandy Greig had now completed his ministerial studies and had accepted the invitation to become minister of Lochgilphead Baptist Church. A full bus left Falkirk early one Saturday morning to travel to Lochgilphead, and Rev John Lyons conducted the Induction Service. I also spoke on behalf of the church. While the proceedings were taking place, we all heard a strange noise outside, which seemed to get louder and louder. So those speaking also had to get louder and louder. Eventually two men slipped out of the church, and a few minutes later the noise

# Personal Memories

stopped. It was the town's pipe band! They were sorry for the noise, and they moved further on. The day was a very happy occasion, enjoyed by everyone. Some of us recalled how one of our previous ministers, Rev William Paterson, had come to us from Lochgilghead Baptist, and had spoken very fondly of this little Highland church. And in June 1967 another member, Mr Cliff Roseweir, completed his studies at the Baptist College. He had accepted the call to Maybole Baptist Church, and again a bus travelled from the church to the Induction Service.

John Furmage resigned the position of Youth Fellowship leader as he was now training for the mission field, and Arthur Hembling took over this role. In 1969 another member of the church, James Clarke, began his studies for the ministry. Valerie Oman and John Furmage were married, before moving to Selly Oak, Birmingham for further missionary training. Their Ordination and Valedictory Service took place two years later, when they went with the Baptist Missionary Society to work in Brazil. James Clarke, when he finished his training in 1972, was Ordinated and Inducted to Dalkeith Baptist Church in August that year. A bus from the church went to Dalkeith, and a happy time was had by all who attended.

## Retiral

Isa retired from the Deacons Court in 1973, due to her health, after 25 years in this role. She was given thanks for her service to the Lord and to the church. We had many happy memories of our time together on the Deacons Court. In 1980 Rev John Lyons celebrated 25 years of ministry at Falkirk Baptist. Shortly afterwards, he told the deacons he would be retiring from the ministry, and he retired on 27th October 1980. I remember speaking on behalf of the church at the 'presentation and

# Personal Memories

farewell' to Rev & Mrs John Lyons just a few days prior to their retiral. I mentioned that we must give God thanks for :- a sustaining grace throughout; five of our 'boys' in the ministry (ie Sandy Greig, Cliff Roseweir, John Furmage, James Clarke and Bill Stirling); John Furmage, and his wife Valerie, became our first missionaries; and many receiving 'sight' by joining the fellowship. Yes, there were disappointments, but there were many more achievements :- faithful preaching; a thoroughness in teaching; and always a willingness to minister to the individual. At the Baptist Union Assembly in 1980, Rev John Lyons was asked to conduct the closing communion service. Deacons from various churches would 'serve the elements'. Douglas Smith and myself represented our church, and this was an experience I never forgot.

In 1981 the church called Rev Ian Reed, who was inducted in March 1982. The following March I notified the church of my wish to retire as treasurer of the church after 19 years service. I was also retiring as a deacon after fifty years service. Dr Fred Cawley was minister when I joined the Deacons Court in 1933. I had also served during the ministries of William Paterson, Matthew Cook, John Lyons, and now Ian Reed. The church unanimously agreed to make me a Life Deacon. Isa's health meant that I didn't always manage out to church services afterwards, but we knew we were both part of the church family. We both had many happy memories of being part of God's family in Falkirk Baptist Church.

**Hugh McClenaghan**

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