

PORT TOBACCO: *A Maryland Mosaic*



On this ground, two cultures — **Indian and European** — confronted one another. Here a commercial town and government center grew, declined, grew again, and declined again.

Residents raised supplies for the **Continental Army** and, during the depression after the **American Revolution**, closed the courts to prevent foreclosures. A great **US President's kidnapping** was plotted, a scheme that ended in his murder. Twenty years earlier two free Africans were tried and convicted

in the courthouse for leading a peaceful slave insurrection. **This is Port Tobacco.**

Potobacs, one of the ancestral groups of today's **Piscataway Indians** and other native groups, had a village in this area in the **1600s**. By the end of that century or early in the next Europeans built a scatter of houses and warehouses called **Chandler's Town**. Renamed **Charles Town** in **1727**, but known locally throughout its history as **Port Tobacco**, the town became, and remained, the **seat of Charles County government until 1896**.

The **only surviving map of the town dates to 1888**, 200 years after initial European settlement. Over those years the town's inhabitants and neighbors shared in the nation's major experiences:

- contact and conflicts with Native Americans;
- the Revolutionary War;
- religious diversity;
- slavery;
- the Civil War; and
- segregation, to name a few.

The people of Port Tobacco helped forge the nation's character. Current research examines those people and the nation they helped create.

The **Port Tobacco Archaeological Project** was created in **2007** to research the 300-year-old town and its aboriginal predecessors.

Tens of thousands of **artifacts** have been unearthed to date, many dating to the years before the **American Revolution of 1776 to 1783**. Scientists study those objects to learn about the beliefs and customs of the area's inhabitants, and to illuminate a complex history that has shaped our present.



ABOVE, excavators recording their finds.

LEFT, sherds of tin-glazed earthenware, or 'delft,' a common 18th-century ceramic.

BELOW, Augustine Hermann map, detail (1673).



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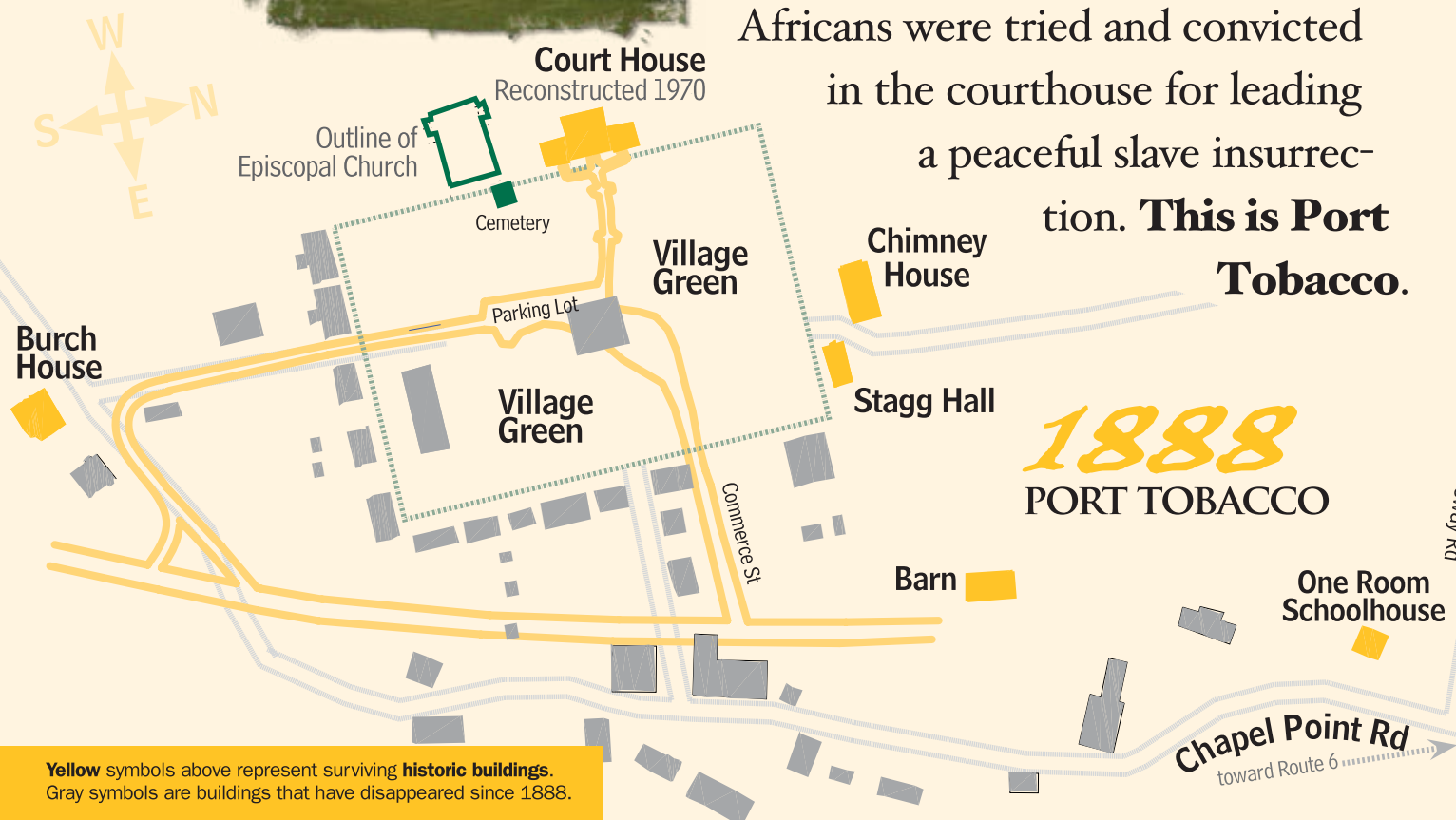


LEFT, Commerce Street in front of Padgett House (1900)



Port Tobacco Courthouse, south wing (1915), Columbia Historical Society Files.

Below, how the courthouse looks today.



Yellow symbols above represent surviving historic buildings. Gray symbols are buildings that have disappeared since 1888.

PORT TOBACCO: *Commerce*



Chimney House and Stagg Hall, late 1800s.

During the 17th century, local Indians often traded corn and deerskins to colonists for knives, steel needles, kettles, cloth, and beads. By the early 18th century, while most colonists dispersed across the

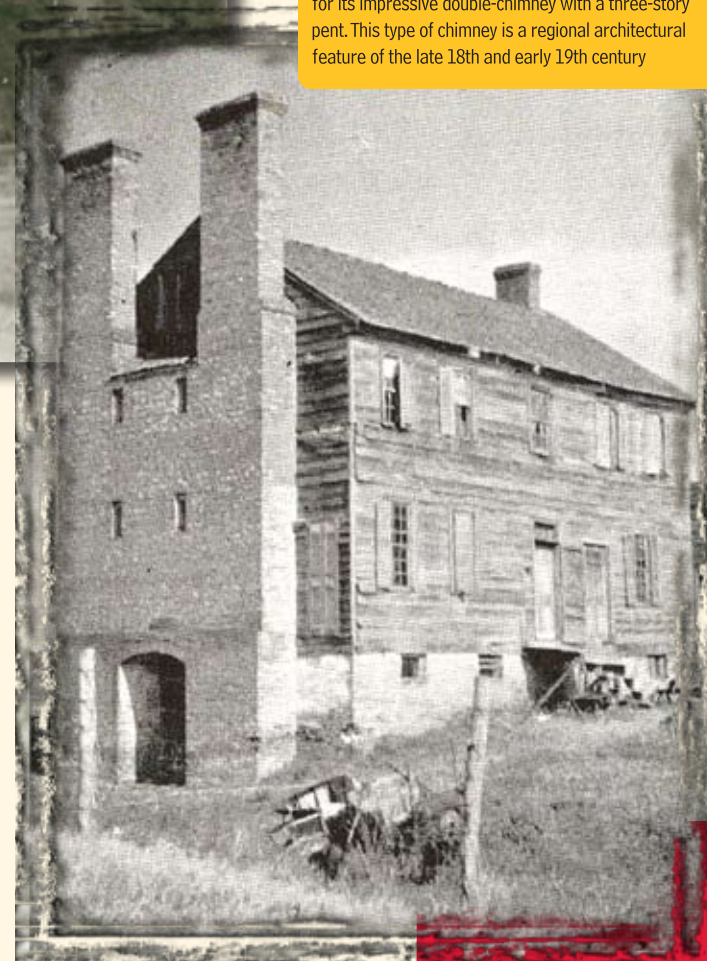
Below, the original interior woodwork at Stagg Hall was purchased by the Chicago Art Institute in 1932 where it remained on display until 1972. The late Robert Barbour purchased and reinstalled it in Stagg Hall.



countryside to farm the land, a few — particularly **Scottish émigrés** —

settled in towns, operating stores out of their houses. Both **Stagg Hall** and **Chimney House** are surviving examples of merchant houses and stores. Stagg Hall was built ca. 1740 for merchant **John Parnham**.

Stagg Hall's well-preserved interior woodwork (left) and exterior make Stagg Hall an extraordinary example of early Colonial architecture. Extensively restored in the 20th century, Chimney House (the Barnes-Compton House) was built for merchant **Thomas Ridgate** in the late 1700s.

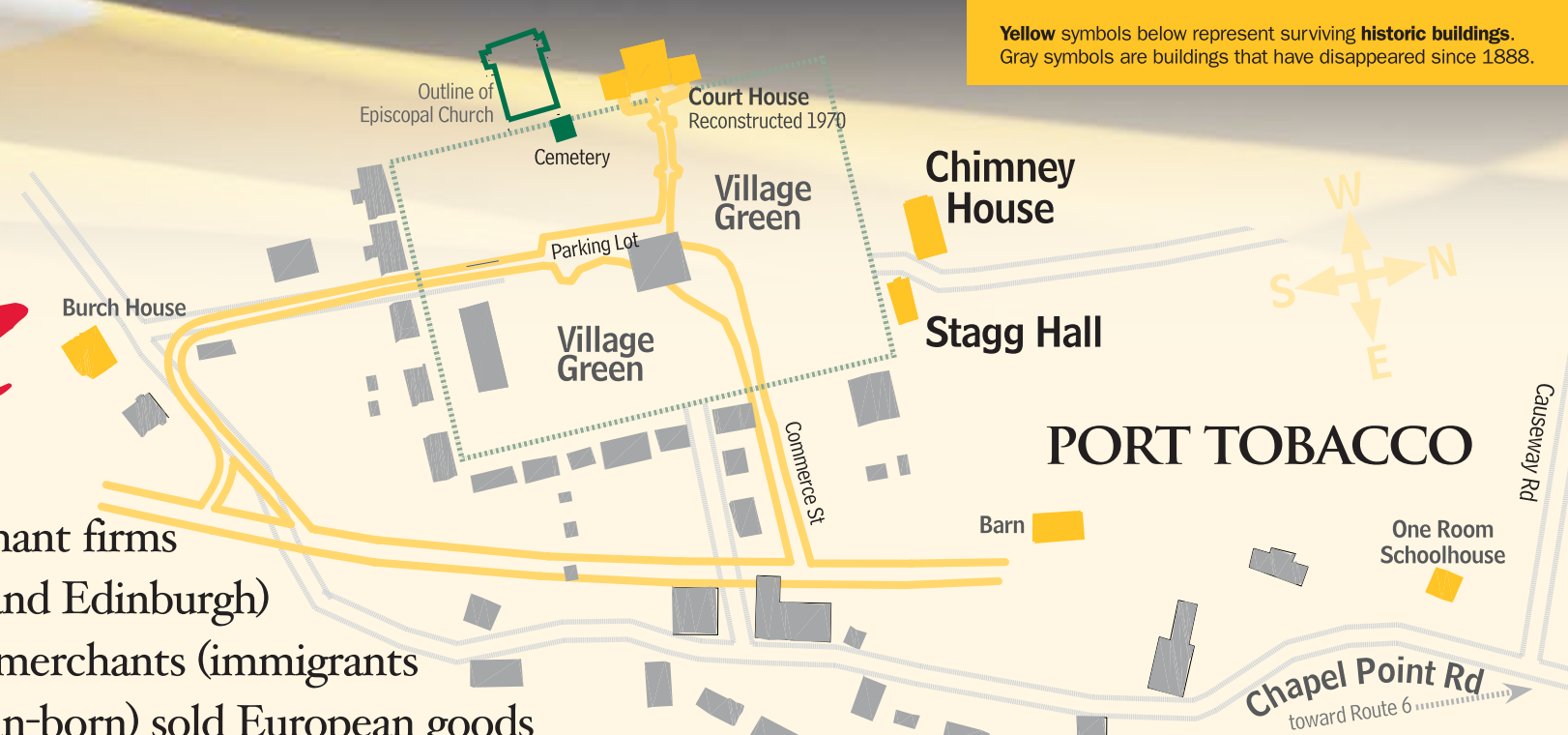


Below, pictured around 1930, is Chimney House, noted for its impressive double-chimney with a three-story pent. This type of chimney is a regional architectural feature of the late 18th and early 19th century

Scots factors (agents of merchant firms

in Glasgow and Edinburgh) and English merchants (immigrants and American-born) sold European goods for cash and on credit to the Potobac Indians and to town residents and area farmers. Cash was hard to come by, so deerskins, tobacco, other agricultural products and implements, and slaves secured credit. **Many of the 18th and early 19th-century artifacts recovered from Port Tobacco were imported from Great Britain.**

By the 1750s Scots factors had established an extensive network of stores along the Potomac River and sold European goods on credit in exchange for tobacco, the cash crop throughout the Chesapeake. **During the 1760s, Port Tobacco passed at least a million pounds of tobacco annually which was shipped to Britain, France, Holland, and Russia.**



Yellow symbols below represent surviving historic buildings. Gray symbols are buildings that have disappeared since 1888.

ARTIFACTS UNEARTHED



ABOVE, RIGHT, Italian or Dutch glass bead (Probable 17th or early 18th century) traded to the Potobac Indians for animal pelts or corn.



LEFT, A merchant or customer clipped this 1748-1759 Spanish dollar to make change.

BOTTOM LEFT, Copper cent minted by the new State of Connecticut between 1785 and 1789.



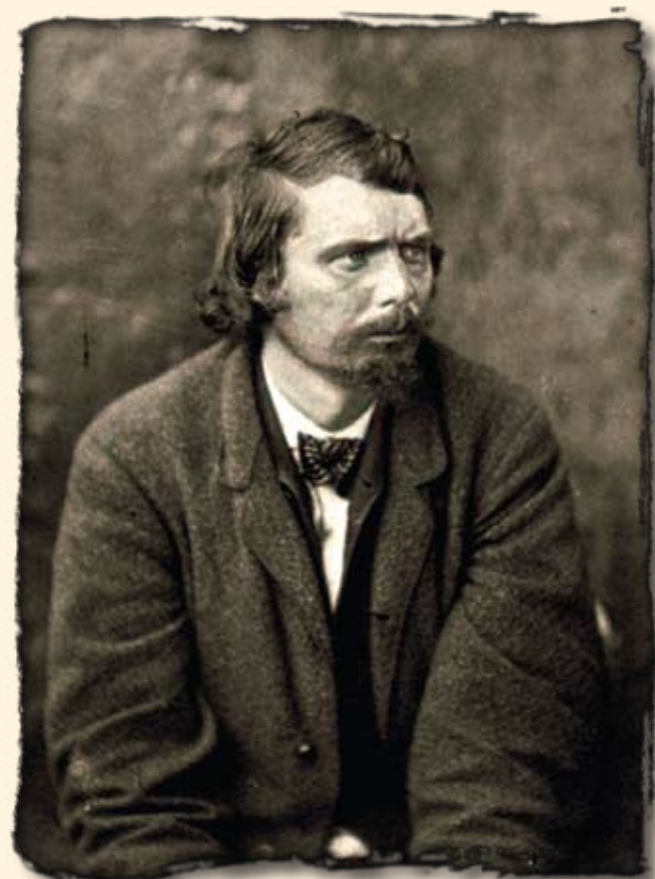
RIGHT, Tin-glazed punch bowl probably made in London, England in the 18th century.



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PORT TOBACCO: *Conspiracy & the Plot to Assassinate President Lincoln*



Photograph of George Atzerodt who, between 1857 and 1861, worked with his brother John in the Atzerodt Brothers Carriage Shop in Port Tobacco.

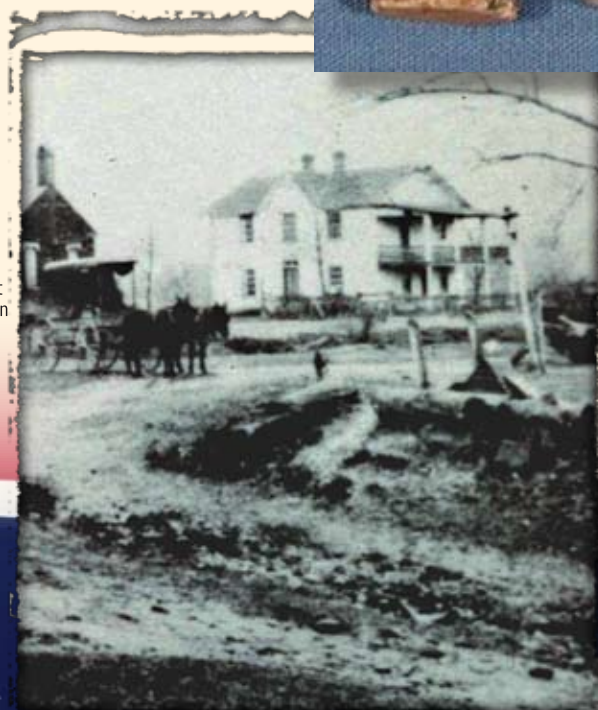
Port Tobacco was the home and place of business of **George Atzerodt**. Although he failed to murder **Vice President Andrew Johnson**, he was convicted and executed for his role in the plot to assassinate **President Abraham Lincoln**.

Part of the plot — when it was supposed to be the abduction of the president to Richmond — was **hatched in Port Tobacco**, possibly at Atzerodt's carriage shop or his home (neither of which has yet

been located), the **Smoot Hotel**, or at the **St. Charles Hotel**. Atzerodt testified that conspirators

John Surratt and John Wilkes Booth came to Port Tobacco several times.

Smoot Hotel, reputed Confederate rendezvous. It burned in 1883, the heat from which broke numerous windows in the courthouse nearby. From NRR



Local **Union Army** units scoured the countryside in search of the assassins for several hectic days in **April 1865**. Some of those units were stationed in and around Port Tobacco. **Archaeological investigations at one nearby camp produced:**

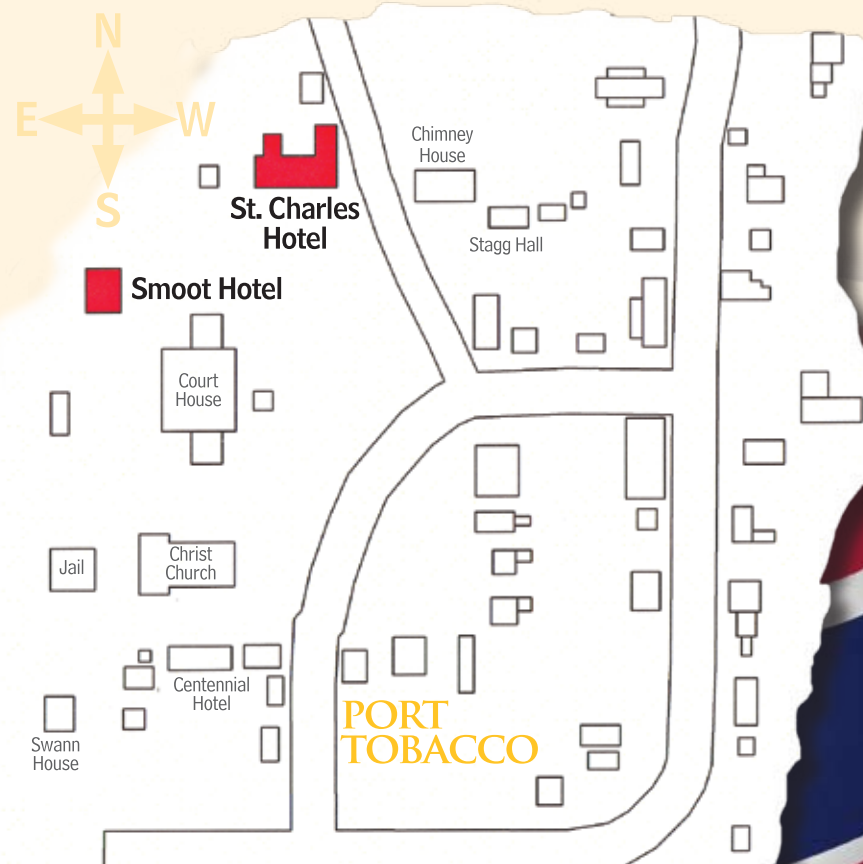
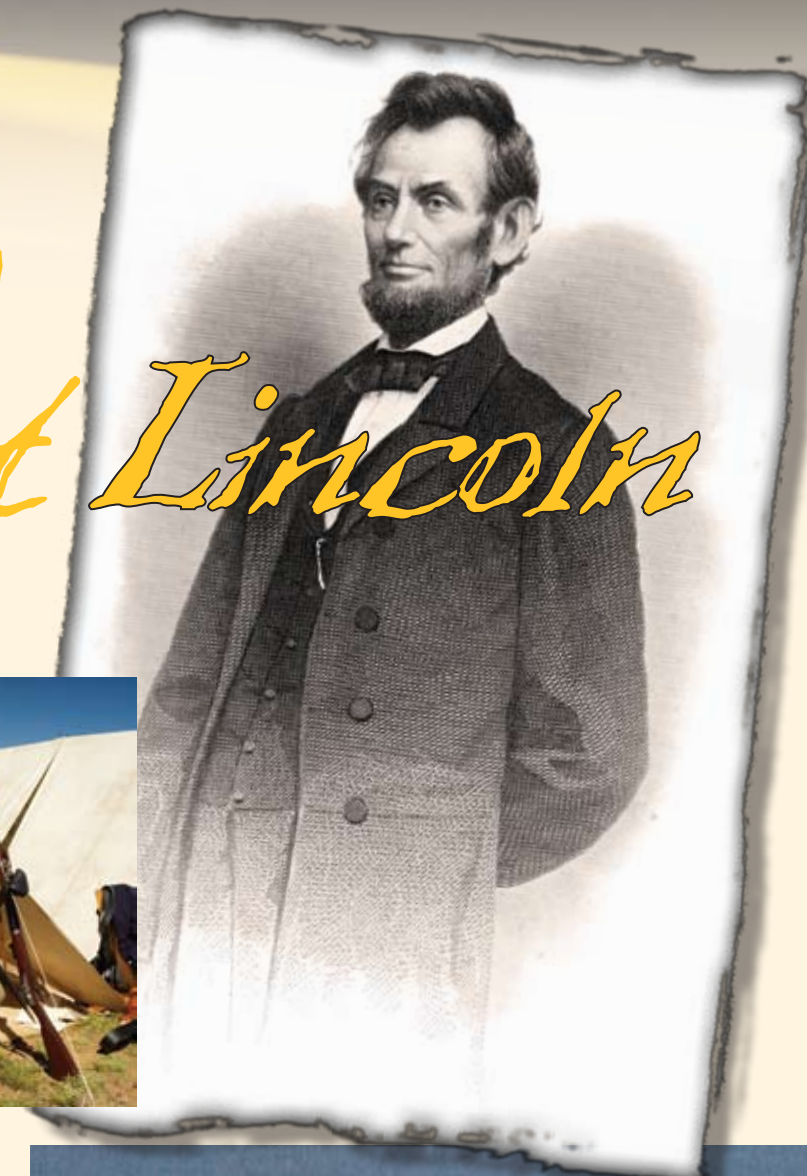
- discarded ammunition,
- horseshoes, and
- personal and uniform items belonging to the soldiers.



ABOVE, Sharps .36 caliber bullets.

ABOVE RIGHT, Inkwell and cover from camp.

RIGHT, Watch chain from camp.



**ARTIFACTS
UNEARTHED**



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