Phelps Helps

Volume 14, Issue 1

Spring 2006

Meetings held at the Nebraska Prairie Museum on the first Monday of the month at 2:00 PM.

The public is welcome!

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DID YOU KNOW? We are continually adding to our obituary books. Harry Stuart is continually indexing each book into a master index. We presently have 15,550 obituaries indexed.

Phelps County's First Grand Jury Recalled

Holdrege Citizen 17 June 1909. H. D. Jane Tells of Session Held in Phelps Center in September 1880.

The present session of the grand jury is not the first ever held in Phelps County. Though we could not find any one who remembered a former session of the grand jury, we fortunately qualified our assertion last week by stating that "so far as we can learn" the present one is the first grand jury ever called here.

Now an old timer has come to our rescue and tells of what was, without a possibility of a doubt, the first grand jury session in the county. Deacon H. D. Jayne has given us the facts of that historical court term.

It was held in September 1880, soon after the county was organized. It convened in the only enclosed building in Phelps Center, there being only two other partially completed buildings in the old county seat at that time. The dwelling they used as a court house was not yet finished, it being necessary for them to meet in an upstairs room.

Judge Gaslin, now living in Alma was the judge and two men now living in the county besides Mr. Jayne served on the Jury. They were J. A. Dunlavy of this city and I. N. Swartwood, living northeast of Funk. The mater before the jury was the murder of a man named Miller by a gang of men on Spring Creek. Miller was shot in a quarrel at a threshing bee and several men were implicated. The grand jury, however, made the mistake of indicting one man to many, the inclusion of an innocent party spoiling the whole case and letting all go free when the case came up for trial before the district court.

GRAND JURY PRONOUNCES DOOM OF OLD COURT HOUSE

Returns True Bill Pointing Out Dangers and Crowded Condition of The Building---

Valuable Records Have To Be Kept in Wooden Cupboards---Oil Soaked Closet Another Menace Found in Their Investigations.

Jurors Recommend That Steps Be Taken at Once to Protect County's Property and to Give Officials Room Needed for Transaction of Business----Some Bad Features Found in Local Hotels Also---The Full Report (Holdrege Citizen 24 June 1909)

The Phelps County Court house has been condemned by the grand jury which examined it last week. By pointing out the inadequacy and dangers of the old building they plainly pronounced its doom.

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(Grand Jury Continued from page 1)

Any taxpayers who may have thought The Citizen's campaign for a new court house was started too soon will have reason now to change that opinion. The verdict of the grand jury on the subject makes it inevitable that we must within the next year at least face the proposition of voting bonds for a modern structure to replace the worn, cramped, unsafe old building. The Citizen

believes the matter should be taken up this fall in connection with the regular elections and thus save unnecessary expenses.

The grand jury says "We therefore recommend that the proper officers adopt some means to provide same, suitable and sufficient protection for the property of the citizens of the county" and adds, "this grand jury urges that the life and property of each person in the county is

in danger to the extent designated herein." Does anyone think for a moment that the grand jury was recommending that the old building be renovated, and more vaults be built in it thus still farther decreasing the office room? That would be the most foolish kind of false economy. Already many thousands of dollars have been spent in securing more vault space and interior changes that at best were only temporary in nature. No, the only sensible to carry out the recommendations of the grand jurors is to plan for a new building without delay.

With such fine crop prospects it would seem that the public spirited people of this county should this fall vote almost as a unit in favor of a new court house that will be a credit to one of the finest counties in the state of Nebraska.

The full report of the grand jury giving the conditions of the hotels as well as of the courthouse follows: (Holdrege, Nebr.; June 19th, 1909)

Memories and Bios of Holdrege High School Class of 1955

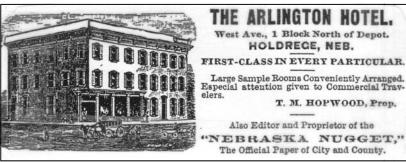
Harlan County Naturalization Records- Ben Boell

Polk's Kearney City Directory - 1961 (Including Buffalo County, NE) - Carol Davis

Teachers and Other Creatures -Written by Eliud F. Ruybalid

To the Honorable Harry S. Duncan, Judge of District Court in and for Phelps County, Nebraska:

The grand jurors, heretofore dully empanelled and sworn and sitting at this, the June term of the court, believe to report as follows: Under the instructions of this court, each hotel in the city of Holdrege has been duly inspected by this grand jury with the following results:



HAMPTON HOTEL: We found a new fireproof safe. Everything upstairs was found to comply with the law and to be in good condition.

CENTRAL HOTEL: We found that they had no safe, and found the fire escape on the second floor in bad repair and not safe. The fire escape on the third floor was unsafe. This hotel has rooms leased outside of the hotel building over an adjoining paint shop and which are connected with the hotel and used for lodging purposes. These said rooms are unsafe and in our judgment should be condemned.

EVANS HOTEL: Everything here was found safe and in good shape with the exception that no notices were posted on the walls as required by law.

ARLINGTON HOTEL: We found no safe in the hotel. No notices were posted on the wall.

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The banister of the front stairway was loose, unsafe and dangerous. It was also found that the outside doors of each hotel were hung so as to open on the inside instead of the outside as required by law.

COUNTY JAIL: An inspection of the county jail discloses that some repairing and painting needs to be done. We would recommend that electric lights be installed in the jail.

COURTHOUSE: Superintendent's office ---This office has no safe place for keeping the valuable books and records necessary to the office. There is not sufficient room in which to conduct the necessary business incident to the office.

Jury room ---We found same entirely too small, poorly ventilated and unfit for that purpose.

County Attorney's Office----The county attorney has no safe place for keeping the records of the office.

County Clerks Office---We found the vault in this office inconvenient and insufficient for the present amount of business. The office itself is too small and has no conveniences.

Sheriff and Clerk of the District Court's Office----These offices have sufficient room

and vault space for the present.

County Judges Office--- We found that the safe in the office would hold only a small portion of the value books, papers and documents of that office; that most of the valuable records kept are on the shelves and in wooden cupboards, where they are exposed for fire and theft.

We also found a dangerous closet under the stairway. This is used for storing oil, matches and janitor's supplies and we especially recommend that the county officers be requested to have it cleaned out at once as it is a very unsafe condition.

This grand jury after a careful inspection of the county court house would suggest that at present there is not an ample, suitable and safe place to keep all the valuable books, papers, files and records of the several offices that at present there are not sufficient and suitable office rooms with which to conduct the necessary business of the county, and that at present there are no conveniences in said building; either for the officers compelled to labor there nor for the citizens whom must transact business there.

We would therefore recommend that the proper officers adopt some means to provide same, suitable and sufficient protection for the property of the citizens of this county.

The inspections herein outlined and the findings thereon are submitted in this report as serious recommendations for this grand jury that the life and property of each person in this county is in danger to the extent designed herein.

Respectfully submitted A. W. Danielson Foreman of the Grand Jury A true bill



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New Members & Their Queries

Catherine Willits
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process of writing about my stay there as part of my life story. I was born in Holdrege so have family ties there. My grandparents were Fred and Bessie Erica (Shostrom) Jackson. My grandfather was a chiropractor in Holdrege for several years. hey are buried in Gothenburg, Nebraska.

I lived at the Christian Orphans Home from September 1937 to June 1940. I am in the

Newspaper Microfilm Holdings Growing! In the Don O. Lindgren Library at the Nebraska Prairie Museum located just north of Holdrege, Nebraska

The Holdrege Area Genealogy Club was recently awarded a grant to help buv microfilm for our library. With the grant money and money from our Treasury we have purchased 21 more reels of Newspaper Microfilm. These new microfilms will be for nearby towns in adjoining counties. The following is a listing of all Newspaper Microfilm that we will have when we receive the new microfilm. These newspaper microfilms are housed in the Library at the Nebraska Prairie Museum in Holdrege, Nebraska. The public is welcome to search our newspaper collection. Our members are there to assist on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons or by special appointment.

- Holdrege Progress
 September 3, 1897-May 5, 1900
- Holdrege Progress January 32, 1909-August 11, 1910
- Holdrege Nugget
 February 7, 1883-June 14, 1887
- Holdrege Daily Citizen
 December 2, 1887-August 31, 1900
- Oxford Standard June 23, 1892-May 25, 1933
- Axtell Times
 May 22, 1896-October 28, 1937
- Elwood Bulletin August 13, 1896-December 29, 1932
 Orleans Chronicles
- June 9, 1892-May 17, 1932
- Wilcox Herald
 April 5, 1895-March 17, 1932
- Wilcox Post January 5, 1893-December 28, 1894

- Wilcox Winner July 7, 1927-December 21 1928
- Republican City June 20, 1902-August 11, 1905
- Republican Ranger August 18, 1905-June 21, 1912
- Ragan Weekly News
 September 27, 1895-Seotember 19, 1902
- Elm Creek Beacon
 June 10, 1898-March 28, 1919
- Harlan County Journal August 27, 1897-January 13, 1928
- Smithfield
 May 8, 1908-July 17, 1913
- Stamford Star December 25, 1914-April 24, 1930



The next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be.

Here are some facts about the 1500s: These are interesting...

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May, and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor. Hence the custom today of carrying a bouquet when getting married.

Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Houses had thatched roofs-thick straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm so all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and off the roof. Hence the saying, "It's raining cats and dogs."

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the saying "dirt poor." The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on floor to help keep their footing.

As the winter wore on, they added more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entranceway. Hence the saying "thresh hold."

(Getting quite an education, aren't you?)

In those old days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while. Hence the rhyme, "Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old. Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man could "bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "upper crust." Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock the imbibers out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence, the custom of holding a "wake."

England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a "bone-house" and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night, "the graveyard shift" to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be "saved by the bell" or was considered a "dead ringer."

And that's the truth... Now, whoever said that History was boring! !!

Phelps Center Passed Up Sacramento to become Phelps County "Metropolis" Both faded away after Holdrege established.

From an article in the Holdrege Daily Citizen-June 1958

The village of Sacramento and Phelps Center were little more than cross-roads settlements in the late "70s". Which of the two was established first cannot be determined from files of the paper and available records at the Citizen. By 1870 both held promise of becoming flourishing towns. Sacramento may have held the edge early in that year; at least the village was selected by B. O. Wilson as the town in which to establish a newspaper, the first to be printed in the county. After approximately a year in Sacramento, the paper, The "Phelps County Pioneer" was moved to Phelps Center which at the November election in 1879 won out as the new county seat. The settlements were about seven miles northwest of the future site of Holdrege and Sacramento about four or five miles to the southeast of that point.

Following the removal of the newspaper from Sacramento to Phelps Center, the editor made a "sentimental" journey back to the town where he founded the paper. His article, printed in the Pioneer, gives the reader an idea of the line-up of the business houses in that town. It follows:

"This week we took a little trip to Sacramento and found that little burg on the Squirt as usual. N. C. Christenson has put up a lumber office and is bringing in several carloads of lumber. He gave us some prices that run from \$1.50 to \$3 less on the thousand than you would have to pay in Kearney, and says he has sold over 20,000 already. He will get his lumber direct from the craftsmen and thus save the large commission usually charged by the lumber merchants.

"J. A. Dunlavy is getting lumber on the ground preparatory to putting up a store 20x40 which he will stock with general merchandise. Hymer Brothers were full of business, they have School and Catham streets just covered on each side of the road with farm implements and their hardware stock chock full of bright new goods.

"Dr. Laurel is busy day and night with patients far and near, with whom he is having good success; He has taken a student, Mr. Will Wood, who, by the way has been reading medicine before this, is pretty well advanced and has placed himself under Dr. Laurel's care to give him the finishing touch; the doctor is going to put up a new drug store and stock it a an early day.

"Mr. J. M. Reed's hammer was ringing away and from the looks of the work piles around him, he ought to be happy. O. C. Sands who apropos, has just returned with his bonnie bride, and the genial "Hod" were busy at stowing away several wagon loads and waiting on customers. Mr. Sands is contemplating building an addition as he has not room enough to handle his immense stock of goods to advantage.

"We had the pleasure of dining with the postmaster and his estimable lady and must say Mrs. Sands plays hostess admirably.

"Altogether we feel sad at heart to think our business compelled us to leave such a promising prosperous and pleasant little village and Sacramento, and we shall always look upon our stay there, although a struggling one, as a bright spot in our life."

"The settlement of Phelps Center was, as the name indicates, located near the exact center of the county and grew up around an emigrant house erected by Leander Hallgren and Victor Rylander.

"Rylander and Hallgren became Union Pacific agents in the year of 1875 for the sale of subsidy land. They selected land for themselves in the center of the county and late in the year began construction of a frame house on the land which they later called the emigrant house, and also dug a well.

The building served a two-fold purpose, to provide shelter for families moving into Phelps county until they could have time to erect homes of their own, and secondly, to provide accommodation for travelers passing through the county. It was a building about 20 by 32 feet in size, and at times had as many as five or six families living in it. The building was completed during the summer of 1876 and was still standing 10 years later.

In January of 1876 Frank Hallgren, a brother of Leander, came west to help his brother finish the house and locate settlers. Rylander and Hallgren went into Swedish settlements in Illinois and other states to interest people in the purchase of railroad land in the county, and to organize excur-

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sion parties of prospective settlers for the new territory.

It was March 6, 1876 that a party of 15 families left Illinois to immigrate to Phelps County. They left Kearney, which was then a town of 500 population, on March 14th, and got as far as Williamsburg in northern Phelps County. After a few days stay in Williamsburg which at the time was only a courthouse and two residences, they drove south to the place where the Hallgrens were building their emigrant house, but it was not until after the November election in 1879, when Phelps center took the county seat away from Williamsburg, that the village started to boom.

Within weeks it became a town of about 100 population, and in a few months boasted of 14 stores. The town grew to an estimated 225 persons in the early '80s before the coming of the railroad sounded death knell for the village. Phelps Center had hopes up to the last moment in October of 1883, when the railroad announced its route would pass several miles south.

Before the fall of 1883 when the mortal blow came with the decision of the railroad to lay its tracks some seven miles away, Phelps Center had dreams of becoming a city.

The town was laid out "with a view to beauty and importance," Streets were wide and all its building faced the public square. A twostory building was constructed in the summer of 1883 to house the school, and two churches had been organized. The town was on a daily stage route form Kearney. Two hotels were in operation and streets were named in metropolitan fashion ---Pennsylvania Avenue, Illinois Avenue, Wyoming Avenue, and Franklin Avenue.

Some of the residents and business houses of Phelps Center who later removed to the new town of Holdrege Included:

Newspapers: Nebraska Nugget, published of T. M. Hopwood; Attorney: Dravo, Treat, Carter Rittenhouse, and George Rhea. Mr. Dravo was the first attorney to locate in Phelps Center, moving from Bloomington.

Hardware: Hymer Brothers; Blacksmiths: Godard, L. Banta; Drug Stores: John Hopwood, Norris Wells. Hopwood lived in Kearney and his drug store was operated by John Crossley; General Store: A. P. Erickson; Implement Business: Hallgren, Hanson; Harness Shop: Billy Richardson; Hotels: Hampton and the Arlington; Broker: Mills Rittenhouse. Banks: Commercial Bank organized of E. D. Einsel; Farmers Merchants Bank, organized by R. T. McGrew. Physicians: Dr. Watkins, Dr. Robinson and Dr. Holt; Postmaster: Mr. Hymer and Rolf Johnson as assistant; Preacher, Rev Olaf Hedlund; School teacher: Mrs. Mona Hopwood; County officers: Peter Peerson, treasurer; P. O. Hedlund, county clerk and surveyor.



Phelps Center, August 12, 1882

Buildings, left to right: Nugget Office, Courthouse, Hymer's Residence, Rittenhouse Law Office, Wm. Wilcox Residence, Hopwood Drug Store, King and Albertson Grocery, Hymer's Hardware Store. Phelps Helps

Ragan, Harlan County, Nebraska

This history of Ragan was written sometime in the 1950s by Jack Vaughn

One of the first families to settle in the vicinity of the present location of Ragan was that of Allen Elliott who homesteaded four miles east and 1 mile north of the town. That NOTE: The Phelps Helps Newsletter highlights Harlan County in this section. With many of our subscribers interested in and from Harlan County, and since Harlan County is a connecting county to Phelps County, the Phelps Helps will publish history information on Harlan County.

was in the fall of 1872. The Elliott's were weary from the long trip from New York by covered wagon and it seemed good to settle down in the tall prairie grass and call it home.

The first school in the district was in the Elliott kitchen. Mrs. Elliott was the teacher and she had five pupils. Her salary the first year was \$14 and the second year she got a 100% raise in pay. Mr. Elliott and a brother dug a well out east of town for the use of all who needed water. The location is still known to this day as "Freewater". Later a schoolhouse was built at the well.

In the winter of 1876-1877 David Huston Homesteaded a little east of the present site of Ragan. Mrs. Huston still lives in the same place. Their son, J. J. Huston, has been in the implement business first in Ragan and later in Holdrege, Nebraska.

A couple of years later, Albert N. Shumard settled about half a mile south of Town. His son Raymond was born on that place and still lives there. Albert was one of the organizers of the Ragan and Wilcox Telephone Company. He served on the school board for many years; also a town clerk, justice of the peace and postmaster for about seven years. He was active in the work of the Republican Party, the lodges and was a charter member of the Methodist church.

Mr. and Mrs. Huston have lived in Ragan for over 20 years. Before retirement they farmed east of town. Mr. Huston first came to the county in May of 1891. Mrs. Huston's parents Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Herndon homesteaded five miles southeast of town in 1881. They also came in a covered wagon and lived for years in a sod house. The Ragan Baptist church was organized in 1878 with meeting in various homes until March of 1881. Rev. Hardin was the first minister. The congregation met at that schoolhouse until 1887 when they moved into town and met at the depot, later moving to town hall where John Taylor was the minister. During

these first years in town, Fred Rainey who ran a livery stable was the song leader.

J. A. Schroeder is another pioneer who still lives at Ragan. He loves to tell about his first experiences in Harlan County in the fall of 1878: "We rented a farm southwest of Ragan and lived there the first year. We hauled water in barrels about a mile from the creek. How well we remember the ten gallon keg and three gallon jug. When we were away from home we stopped at the last well coming home and filled them up to drink and cook with."

"During that fall I remember the first prairie fire I ever saw. There were some movers camped overnight not far away. A little while after they were gone a strong wind came up from the north and blew the thin fire into a heavy grass by the creek causing a terrible prairie fire that came right down on us. We had a sod house and dug-out barn. My parents were so badly scared my mother put me to bed and covered up my head."

The next year, Schroeder's moved into the vicinity of Huntley where they stayed for many years. In 1933 they moved back to Ragan.

After the railroad was put through in 1887, several business houses sprang up. One of the first, of course was the elevator with was operated by J. H. Carroll and Frank Stevens. This was soon followed by the hotel, Rainey's livery stable, a drug store opened by John Elliott, Lumber yard and the bank, owned by Albert Cross and Alexander Johnston. The first postmaster was John Hawksby.

In the spring of 1894, the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in the school house. Rev. Mr. King was the pastor. They (Ragan Continued on page 9)

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later met at the depot and then in the town hall. In the spring of 1898 under the leadership of Rev. T. S. Davenport, the Methodist Church was constructed.

In the fall of the same year, the Baptist church was built, John A. Huston being the head carpenter for the building of both churches.

Bill Herndon was the first song leader and choir director for the Baptists after the building of the church. Another familiar name about the year of 1904 was R. A. Danskin, the implement dealer, who served as deacon and choir leader. The church was remodeled in 1917. The Baptists are without a pastor at the present.

It was the early nineties when Ragan's first school was taught by a Mrs. Bates and held in a residence. Later a one room school was built and a three room school was built. This served them until the present building was constructed in 1916. In 1920 it was made a consolidation of six districts becoming the first consolidated school in the state.

The school has 71 pupils, 51 in the grades and 20 in the high school. Supt Louis Gibson and his staff of six teachers have a nice group of young people and good facilities to work with. Only recently have they purchased an opaque projector, a film strip projector and a tape recorder; all of these to be used in the class room. The school furnishes a hot lunch for the children, serving some 65 a day.

Now a quick look around Ragan to see what other businesses we can find. The Hart-Bartlett Grain Elevator is run by Willard



Sheldon who has been around for abut five years; Everett Sterner runs a garage. The Ragan Co-op oil company is managed by Art Roos and George Brawner runs the grocery store. The proprietor of the Ragan Journal is W. E. Ruff and Mrs. Mary Sloan operates the switch-board for the Farmer's and Merchant's Telephone Company.

Like many kindred villages, Ragan was doing fine until the depressive thirties rolled in. Many business houses were forced to close; some of the people moved away; they just haven't come back. A few far-sighted ones still think they will return. Let us



hope they do.

A special thank you to Carolyn "Suzie" Peterson who donated this photograph. (Ruth Peterson is the daughter of J. O. Peterson)

FOURTH GRADE CLASS TAKEN ABOUT 1919

Pupils are George McNeil; Roy Peterson; Floyd Walker; Raymond Clausen; Ruth Peterson; Bernard Borg; Benjie Howell; Helen Shedd

View of Ragan, Nebraska

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Sam Dravo's Law Office at Phelps Center: Mrs. P.O. Hedlund P.O. Hedlund Arthur (Baby) Mrs. Will Dilworth Minnie Larson C.A. Dilworth S.A. Dravo (with dog) Chas. Backman Harry Hazlett J.P. Hymer Sam Moshier Louis Newman A.P. Wilcox John Danielson Irv Street

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