

The Rookery Overview

The Rookery Building At-a-glance

Designed: 1885

Built: 1885-1888

Cost: \$1,500,000

Architects: Daniel Hudson Burnham (1846-1912) and John Wellborn Root (1850-1891)

Contractor: George A. Fuller

Land: Leased from the City of Chicago for 99 years at \$35,000 per year. The city is responsible for the property taxes.

Developer: Central Safe Deposit Company - Owen Aldis (-1925), President and Edward Carson Waller (1845-1931), Secretary. Shareholders – Boston-based brothers Peter Chardon Brooks (1831-1920) and Shepherd Brooks (1837-1922) (majority interest), plus architect Daniel Burnham, architect and developer Norman B. Ream, ornamental iron producer William Winslow, elevator magnate and developer William E. Hale, and others. Ed Waller will manage the building from 1888 until shortly before his death in 1931.

Alterations: 1905-1907 – Frank Lloyd Wright remodeled the Adams and LaSalle Street lobbies, interior light court and elevators

. 1931 – William E. Drummond remodeled the Adams and LaSalle Street lobbies, interior light court and elevators

. 1988-1992 – Baldwin Development and McClier complete major restoration, returning the exterior, Adams and LaSalle Street lobbies and interior light court to their ca. 1910 appearance and the LaSalle elevator lobby to its ca. 1931 appearance. The remainder of the building is modernized.

Sq. footage: 286,000 s.f (4,756,700 cubic feet)

Floors: 11 full floors and one partial 12th floor. A more usable 12th floor was added for a key tenant near the end of the 1992 renovation.

Dimensions: Nearly a perfect cube – 168-foot frontage on Adams, 178-foot frontage on LaSalle, and 164 feet high

Foundations: A floating raft spread foundation of beam and rail grillages – a waffled screen of steel rails anchored inside a mat of concrete. The foundation sank only 1 inch after the weight of the building was applied.

Construction: Cast iron columns. Exterior of dark brown brick and terra cotta, granite, wood window sash and plate glass. Interior – white carrarra marble, ornamental cast iron with bronze and copper finish, white-glazed brick, gold terracotta, mosaic tile floor, wainscoted oak, and glass.

HISTORY OF THE ROOKERY

The Rookery Building is located at 209 South LaSalle Street in Chicago. It was designed by the Chicago architectural firm of Burnham and Root in 1885 and construction began later that year employing a unique method of tenting the site and heating the ground for year-round construction. The building was completed in 1888.

Burnham and Root were commissioned to design the Rookery Building to house the Central Safety Deposit Company (the entity created for the recently-completed Home Insurance Building (1882-1884 – William LeBaron Jenney – directly across Adams Street) and to serve as a high rise office building.

Burnham and Root produced more than 2 dozen commercial buildings in the city of Chicago during the 1880s and 1890s. Of these, only the Rookery, Monadnock and Reliance buildings remain.

Daniel Burnham (1846-1912) is credited with the innovative engineering and layout of the building and John Wellborn Root (1850-1891) is credited with the ornamentation and details.

The name of the building was carried over from a nickname given to the structures that occupied the Rookery site prior to its design. These buildings, Chicago's temporary city hall (1872) and a water tank (1854), were known popularly as "the rookery".

When completed, the Rookery, at officially eleven stories, was one of the tallest buildings in the world. Today it is considered the oldest standing "tall" building in Chicago. At the time of its completion, the Rookery was also one of the most expensive and largest commercial buildings in the city of Chicago, housing more than 600 offices and a daily population of 4,000 workers.

The building is an example of early Chicago tall building style architecture. It combines masonry exterior walls with steel and iron interior supports. The enormous weight of the building is supported on a "grillage" foundation system designed by Root. In addition to the remarkable structural and foundation system, the building successfully combined many other hallmark features of the Chicago tall building style: passenger elevators, fireproofing, plate glass and electrical lighting.

In 1905, architect, Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) was commissioned to update the interior design and plan of the light court and lobbies. Wright's remodeling was sensitive to Root's original design and served to unify and enhance the luxurious light filled lobbies and central court.

In 1931, William Drummond (1876-1946) won a competition to remodel the lobbies once again. Drummond's remodeling obscured much of the openness of the original lobby design and updated the elevators and other interior features in the current Art Deco style. Drummond worked for both Wright (1899-1901, 1905-1909) and Burnham (1903-1904) and was part of the team (including Francis Barry Byrne) who worked on Wright's 1905-1907 Rookery commission. Drummond hired Byrne (1883-1967) as his contractor for the 1931 remodeling and Byrne's wife Annette Cremin Byrne (1898-1990) to design an Art Deco motif from Wright's designs with incorporated rooks for the remodeled lobby marble and brass elevator doors.

Sometime around 1957 much of the interior light court was covered over further obscuring the building's original design.

In 1970, the Rookery was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1972, the City of Chicago designated the Rookery as an official Chicago Landmark.

In 1982, in anticipation of the expiration (in 1984) of the original 99-year lease to the Central Safety Deposit Company, ownership of the building and land reverted back to the city of Chicago who began shopping for a new owner. A covenant protects the exterior, the Adams and LaSalle Street lobbies and the interior light court.

In 1983, Continental Bank purchased the property and began plans for restoration. After entering bankruptcy, the bank sold the building in 1988 to Baldwin Development Company

In 1992, The Baldwin Development Company together with the McClier Corporation as restoration architects completed the restoration of the Rookery. The building was restored to approximately 1910 - its early appearance combining Burnham and Root's impressive design with Wright's luxurious treatment of lobbies and light court. Drummond's Art Deco elevator lobby also remained since, at the time, it was unclear if the tented plaster ceiling was his work or Wright's. It is now believed to be Drummond's.

In December 2010, the Frank Lloyd Wright preservation Trust located its administrative offices in Suite 118 on the ground floor of the interior light court. A ShopWright retail space will open in an adjacent location during the Summer of 2011. The Trust will operate tours beginning on April 1, 2011.

Beginnings

- The Rookery Building, located at 209 South LaSalle Street, was designed by the Chicago architectural firm of Burnham and Root in 1885. Construction began that year and the building was completed in 1888.
- The Rookery was commissioned by Boston developers, Peter C. and Shepherd Brooks together with Chicagoan Owen Aldis, to house the newly founded Central Safety Deposit Company and to serve as a high rise office building. The lot on the corner of LaSalle and Adams Street was leased from the city for a period of 99 years. At a cost of \$1.5 million, the building's investors included Daniel Burnham, Edward C. Waller, Owen Aldis and Peter C. and Shepherd Brooks.
- From 1872 – 1885, the site at 209 South LaSalle was occupied by Chicago's temporary city hall and a water tank built in 1854. (After the fire of 1871, a temporary city hall was located on the southeast corner of LaSalle and Adams Streets.) In 1885, Chicago City Hall was relocated. The first Chicago Public Library occupied the repurposed water tank from 1873-1885.

Building Name

- The structures occupying the site at 209 South LaSalle Street were known popularly as "the rookery" owing to the fact that a large population of Chicago's pigeons had selected them as a roosting area. The public also associated the term with the atmosphere of corruption and cronyism that they felt characterized city hall. When the building was completed in 1888, the popular name stuck and the building has been known as the Rookery ever since.
- Root was apparently fond of the popular name of the building; he designed rooks (a crow-like bird) to be carved onto the building's exterior.

Burnham and Root

- Daniel H. Burnham and John Wellborn Root met in 1872 in the offices of Carter, Drake and Wight where both worked as draftsmen. They formed a partnership in 1873 with Burnham developing and managing the firm and Root serving in the primary design

role. The partnership of Burnham and Root was one of the most successful Chicago School firms, producing more than 2 dozen commercial buildings in the city of Chicago during the 1880s and 1890s. Of these, only the Rookery, Monadnock and Reliance buildings remain. After Root's death in 1891, the firm continued as D. H. Burnham & Company. After Burnham's death in 1912 it continued on as Graham, Anderson, Probst and White.

The Building

- When designed, the Rookery, at eleven stories (with a partial 12th floor), was one of the tallest buildings in the world. Today it is considered the oldest standing "tall" building in Chicago.
- The Rookery occupied a quarter block site in the chief financial district and at the time of its completion, it was one of the most expensive and largest commercial buildings in Chicago, housing more than 600 offices.
- Combining heavy masonry exterior walls of polished and rusticated red granite and brick with steel and iron interior supports, the building is an early hybrid Chicago tall building. The building's enormous vertical weight is supported on a "grillage" foundation system designed by Root to disperse the load across a grill-like web of iron rails encased in concrete.
- In addition to the remarkable structural and foundation system, the building successfully combined many other hallmark features of the Chicago tall building style: passenger elevators, fireproofing, plate glass and electrical lighting.
- The building's massive and highly ornamented masonry exterior with Romanesque entry arches on LaSalle and Adams Streets encloses an airy, transparent interior core. While the exterior exudes strength and permanence, desirable qualities in a post-1871 Chicago financial and commercial structure, the interior is all light and transparency. Root's design of the central light court allowed natural light to reach interior offices instead of just the outer ones, making more of the interior office space desirable and commercially viable.
- The building had a practical plan but sculptural and luxurious feel, achieved through eclectic terra cotta ornamentation derived from Romanesque, Moorish and Byzantine sources on the exterior and decorative ironwork of the structural and functional elements on the interior, like the "oriel" staircase in the interior light well.
- Organized around a hollow, square light well of glazed white brick and gold terra cotta ornamentation that encompassed the central area of the building, the interior is designed to admit the fullest expression of natural light. Numerous large glass windows on the exterior admit an enormous amount of natural light into offices and public areas of the interior. The airy, open 2-story central court functioned as a public square – a place where visitors to offices and shops could pass, congregate and be impressed by the luxurious surroundings of this commercial edifice.
- Soon after completion, Burnham and Root relocated their offices to the 11th floor of the Rookery. The firm's offices remained in the building until completion of the Burnham designed Santa Fe (originally Railway Exchange) building in 1906 when they moved there. The Burnham and Root Rookery offices were the official headquarters for the 1893 Columbian Exposition planning from 1890-92.

Wright's early connection to the Rookery

- As early as 1898, Wright had an office in the Rookery Building, which he occupied in the middle of the day. In an announcement in 1898, Wright wrote:
 - "The practice of Architecture as a profession has a fine art as well as commercial elements. These should be combined to their mutual benefit, not mixed to their detriment. To develop ... this fine art side in combination with commercial, the architect should place himself in an environment that conspires to develop the best there is in him. The first requisite is a place fitted and adapted to the work to

be performed and set outside distractions of the busy city. ... To practice the profession of architecture along these lines, and to give clients the better results, a complete architectural workshop has been constructed at Oak Park and for purely business purposes, consultation and matters in connection with superintendence an office has been located in "The Rookery," Chicago. OFFICE HOURS: At 1119 Rookery from twelve to two, P.M. Telephone Main 2668. ..."

- Sculptor Richard Bock wrote that the Boulders, two sculptures for the new Oak Park studio, were carved in Wright's 11th floor Rookery studio, probably from a glass-enclosed space on the building's roof.
- In 1899, when Wright submitted photographs of his new Oak Park studio for a Chicago Architecture Club exhibition, he gave his business address as 435 The Rookery. By 1900 he'd relocated to another downtown space.
- William Winslow and Edward Waller (early Wright clients), the Luxfer Prism Company and architects Burnham and Root all had offices in the Rookery in the late 1890s.

Frank Lloyd Wright, Edward Waller and the Rookery

- In 1905, Wright was hired by Edward C. Waller, manager of the Rookery (and secretary of Central Safety Deposit Company) to remodel the interior light court and building's lobbies.
- In addition to being manager of the Rookery from 1888 through 1930, Waller was one of Wright's most important early clients. Waller was a neighbor of William H. Winslow in Auvergne Place, River Forest. Waller lived across the street from the Winslow House and it was from Waller that Winslow acquired the property in Auvergne Place.
- Edward C. Waller commissioned Wright to design two apartment complexes in 1895 - Francisco Terrace Apartments and the Edward C. Waller Apartments, both in Chicago. Waller had also commissioned Wright to remodel a portion of his Burnham and Root designed residence in Auvergne Place in 1899 and to design a stable (now demolished) and the gates to the Waller Estate in River Forest in 1901.
- About 1894, Waller, a childhood friend of Burnham, hosted a dinner in River Forest in River Forest where Burnham offered Wright 4 years of study in Paris and 2 years in Rome, after which time Wright would be made head of design at D. H. Burnham and Co. Wright declined the offer.
- Waller's son, Edward C. Waller Jr. commissioned Wright to design Midway Gardens in 1913 (demolished 1929).

Frank Lloyd Wright's Remodeling of the Rookery

- In 1905, Frank Lloyd Wright was commissioned to update the first floor interior of the Rookery's light court and lobbies. Wright refaced much of the interior space in broad planes of white marble incised with gold leaf gilding. In the light court, he encased Root's original columns in white marble. (In the lobby today, one is able to see one of Root's original columns revealed beneath Wright's later recladding.)
- Wright removed most of Root's elaborate ironwork in the central light court, replacing it with simple, geometrically ornamented ironwork derived from Root's original design. Wright also replaced Root's electroliers that flanked the main staircase in the light court with white marble planters supported on squared, simplified piers and installed pendant lighting. In the Adams Street lobby, Wright added massive geometric urns.
- These changes served to modernize the interior and unify the three lobby areas (LaSalle, Street lobby, Adams Street lobby and central light court).

Subsequent History

- In January 1931, Ed Waller died at age 85, the last of the original investors. A few weeks later, it was announced that the firm Halsey Stuart & Co. was taking additional space in the Rookery and extensive remodeling would take place to the lobbies and

second floor. William Drummond won a competition to remodel the elevators and lobbies once again and maximize leasable space. Drummond's updates included modernizing the mechanical systems, re-designing the elevator lobbies, and redesigning both entrance lobbies to create additional leasable space.

- By 1957, glass in the interior light court was painted over further obscuring the building's original design.
- In 1970, the Rookery was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. And in 1972, the City of Chicago designated the Rookery as an official Chicago Landmark.
- In 1982, the original 99 year lease to the Central Safety Deposit Company expired and ownership of the property reverted back to the city of Chicago.
- In 1983, Continental Bank purchased the property and began plans for restoration.
- In 1988, Continental Bank sold the property to Baldwin Development Company
- In 1992, The Baldwin Development Company together with the McClier Corporation as restoration architects completed the restoration of the Rookery. The building was restored to its 1905 appearance but with an additional floor added to the top of the building. The restoration returned the Rookery to its early splendid condition combining Burnham and Roof's impressive design with Wright's luxurious lobbies and light court.

ROOKERY DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION CHRONOLOGY

1872 (January) - After the Chicago fire, a temporary city hall was completed by architect John Mills van Osdel, which was very much a makeshift structure. Cost was \$75K including furnishings. It surrounded the old 1854 South Reservoir iron water tank (which had survived the fire); the roof on the water tank was replaced by a skylight and it became the first public library reading room, opening in January 1873. (*Hasbrouck Hunderman*)

1883 "[Edward Carson] Waller organized the Central Safety Deposit Company in 1883 as a vehicle for the construction in 1884-85 of the Chicago headquarters of the New York Home Fire Insurance Company, unleashing a chain of events that were no doubt rooted in the close relationship between Waller and Dan Burnham forged during the Nevada prospecting expedition, if not earlier." (Berger)

1884 New city hall is built at a different site and old temporary city hall is abandoned. (Hill)

1884 – 1885 "One of the most significant buildings in the history of high-rise architecture was the work of one of the most creative but least known of Chicago's late nineteenth-century developers. The structure was the 1885 Home Insurance Building, the first skyscraper anywhere to use iron and steel skeleton construction....The developer was Edward Carson Waller, who at a critical time in the evolution of the new technology backed the project not only financially but also with full force of his personal charisma and his network of friends.

Waller, a real estate broker and property manager, was also the guiding force behind the construction of the equally interesting building known as the Rookery, built a year later through the same Waller-managed syndicate that directed the development of the Home Insurance Building." (Berger)

1885 (Jan – Feb) Chicago City Council gives lease for Rookery property to Henry S. Everhart. Waller had submitted a bid, but it was ignored. (Berger)

1885 “Waller played a similar role in the acquisition of the south-east corner of LaSalle and Adams streets, opposite the Home Insurance Buildings, as the site for the famed Rookery, designed by Burnham’s partner John Root.” (Berger)

1885 (May) Waller again submits bid to the City Council which this time is approved. The bid differs little from Everhart’s previously accepted bid. Prior to bid submission, Waller had talked to Mayor Carter Harrison. (Berger)

1885 (May) “The facts with regard to the leasing of the ground upon which the old city hall or ‘rookery’ stands, are briefly, that Mr. E. C. Waller, a prominent real estate dealer, representing a number of capitalists, has leased the lot for ninety-nine years, at an annual rental of \$35,000 with no re-valuation. The contract with the city states stipulates the erection of a building to cost \$1,000,000, and though the architect has not been definitely appointed, sketches have been drawn, and the statement may be made, that the structure will be ten stories in height, and the first floor on a level with the street.” (*Inland Architect*. Vol 5 No 4, May 1885)

1885 (May) Work begins on the removal of “old barracks” (temporary city hall) on the property. Work is halted when rival bidder for property sought to annul the Waller lease. (Berger)

1885 (ca. Jul) “Apparently, design of the new building had begun several months before Burnham and Root received the commission...” (Hasbrouck Hunderman)

1885 (Oct) Commission for Rookery given to Burnham and Root by Peter and Shepherd Brooks of Boston (Art Institute), Owen Aldis, agent. (Condit)

1885 (ca Oct) Stockholders for Central Safe Deposit Company include Waller, Brooks Brothers, Owen Aldis, Norman Beam (architect), William Hale (elevators), and Daniel Burnham. (Berger)

1885 (Dec) - Brooks signs 99 year lease with city. “Burnham apparently in charge of main layout....actual design and refinement of details was left to Root.” (Art Institute)

1885 (Dec) - Legal cloud is lifted and the land lease is assigned to Waller on Dec 4, 1885 (Hasbrouck Hunderman). Then it is transferred to the Central Safe Deposit Company and signed. Building is estimated to cost \$1.5 MM. (Berger)

1886 (ca. Jan) - Brooks Brothers had taken the lion’s share of the stock of Central Safe Deposit Company. Owen Aldis is president of the company, and Edward Waller is the secretary. (Berger)

1885 (late) –**1886** (early) “Supplied with ideas and suggestions from his business friend, Edward Waller, Burnham reviewed what he had learned since the Montauk and produced a plan so efficient and so ‘liveable’ that the Rookery would continue into the late 20th century to be one of Chicago’s most prestigious and sought-after office

locations. (Hines) "Burnham probably developed the plan with advice from Waller..." (Schaffer) "Constructed during the transition from masonry to metal skeletal structure, the Rookery employs both systems. Burnham, however, wanted to use only the skeletal construction on the exterior as well as the interior court, which would have allowed for larger openings. Root reportedly convinced the client to choose the heavier wall articulation. (Schaffer)

1886 – 1887 Root began designing in spring of 1886. Drawing up of plans and construction continued through 1887, with several revisions. (Art Institute) "By March of [1886], Burnham and Root had the commission well in hand, and construction was underway. Drawing and construction continued through 1887, with revisions to the original scheme, and the building was completed early in 1888." (Hasbrouck Hunderman)

1886 By the end of March, 1886. granite work was beginning to show above ground. Extant drawings are dated between April 1886 and October 1887. (Hoffman)

1886 (Jun) - "The Central Safety Deposit Company of Chicago, represented by Mr. E. C. Waller, is erecting, through architects Burnham & Root on the southeast corner of Adams and La Salle street, what will probably result in the largest office building in this country....The building has not yet received its name, though a general suggestion has been made to call it the 'Rookery', as the city buildings which were removed to give it place were so called. It will be finished in about two years, and will cost at least \$1,250,000." (*Inland Architect*, Vol 7 No 9, June 1886)

1886 – 1888 "The general contractor is the George Fuller Co." (Schaffer). Brick provided by Chicago Anderson Pressed Brick Co., terra cotta by Northwestern Terra Cotta Co., plate glass by James H. Rice Co., marble by Davidson and Son, iron by Hecla Iron Works, elevators by Hale Hydraulic Elevators. (Hasbrouck Hunderman)

1888 Building was finished in early 1888. Contemporaneous with Field Wholesale Building by H. H. Richardson. Exterior dimensions 168 feet on Adams by 178 feet on LaSalle, interior court 62 feet by 71 feet. (Art Institute) The building contained over 350,000 square feet in its eleven stories, attic, basement, and light court. (Hasbrouck, Hunderman) "With eleven stories accommodating over 600 offices, the Rookery was the largest office building in Chicago. (Schaffer)

1888 "Thomas E. Tallmadge, who as a young architect shared offices with Burnham in the building, later wrote that it was Waller 'who conceived the Rookery and remained its guiding genius during his long life.'" (Berger)

1888 Burnham and Root established their office on southeast corner of 11th floor in April 1888. (Hoffman). The office had a library, drafting rooms, office, bath, and printing facilities. (*Inland Architect* Vol 12 No 2, September 1888)

1888 (Jun) Largest Edison plant up to that time opens at the Rookery to supply 4500 lights [gas is also supplied for dual fixtures]. (*Electrical Engineer*, Jul 1888)

1889 The safety deposit vaults, managed by Illinois Trust and Savings Bank, opened May 15. 1889 (Hasbrouck Hunderman).

BURNHAM AND ROOT CHRONOLOGY

- 1846** Burnham born Henderson, NY
- 1850** Root born Lumpkin, GA
- 1855** Burnham came to Chicago with family
- 1868** Burnham enters office of William LeBaron Jenney, leaves soon thereafter
- 1868** Burnham joins his friend Ed Waller in expedition to Nevada mining country (Berger)
- 1871** Burnham partnership with Gustave Laureau, ruined by Chicago Fire
- 1871** Root joins Carter, Drake, and Wight
- 1872** Burnham's father places him as draftsman at Carter, Drake, and Wight
- 1873** Burnham and Root form partnership as *Burnham and Root*
- 1881 – 1882** First Burnham and Root commercial work, Montauk Building, commissioned by Peter C. and Shepherd Brooks, agent Owen F. Aldis
- 1883 – 1884** Calumet Building
- 1884** Counselman Building
- 1885** Insurance Exchange Building (208 S. LaSalle St, demolished 1912)
- 1885 – 1888** Rookery Building, 209 S. LaSalle St. – Peter C. and Shepherd Brooks investors; Owen Aldis, Edward Waller, and Burnham are also investors. (Berger)
- 1889 – 1890** Second Rand McNally building, first Burnham and Root building using complete skeletal construction
- 1890** Burnham named chief of construction for World's Fair, Dwight Perkins takes over most office business
- 1891** Root dies, company name changed to *D.H. Burnham and Co.* Much of work of design and organization entrusted to Charles Atwood, Dwight Perkins, and Ernest R. Graham
- 1892** Fine Arts Building (now Museum of Science and Industry) at World's Fair designed by *D.H. Burnham*, Charles Atwood designer.
- 1894** Reliance Building – Charles Atwood designing architect, Edward Shankland structural engineer
- 1895 +** After Reliance Building, "...increasing proportion of Burnham's enormous vitality was devoted to city planning and civic art."
- 1897** Burnham and Owen Aldis exchange letters on project centered on what was later to be Grant Park
- 1890's** *D.H. Burnham* becomes largest firm in Chicago. Among projects are Marshall Field Store, First National Bank of Chicago, Flatiron Building (New York), Penn Station (Pittsburgh), and Washington Union Station. None are in the commercial style known as the Chicago School.
- 1900 +** "...[while] Daniel Burnham was almost exclusively preoccupied with city planning and civic projects in the last decade of his life, his office enjoyed an immense volume of major architectural commissions. After 1900, the administration of this designing corporation was in the hands of his chief partner, Ernest Robert Graham, who had joined the firm of Burnham and Root in 1888."
- 1904** Railway Exchange Building, offices move to that building by 1906
- 1912** "When Daniel Burnham died in 1912, Graham, together with Burnham's sons,

- Hubert and Daniel, founded the organization of *Graham, Burnham, and Company*.
1917 "On the departure of Burnham's sons in 1917, the enterprising Graham established what was probably the most productive firm in the history of American architecture – *Graham, Anderson, Probst, and White* – a corporation still in existence under the same title." [closed ca. 2009]
1924 Illinois Merchants Trust, 231 S. LaSalle St (1932 Continental Illinois Bank and Trust Co. after merger with Continental and Commercial Bank, 1994 Bank of America.)
1934 Field Building, 135 S. LaSalle St. built on site of Home Insurance Building, 1885, William LeBaron Jenney)
1936 Ernest Graham and dies

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