

# TRANSATLANTIC MAIL STUDY GROUP

of the

British North America Philatelic Society

Newsletter No. 26

Jack Arnell, Chairman

January 1992

## LAST CALL FOR SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

The response of the group members was very heartening, as the majority sent me a cheque for Ten Dollars—a couple sent in a little extra, which is much appreciated, and for which I thank you! As I intend to discontinue sending newsletters after this one to those who have not sent in a subscription, either through oversight or a lack of interest, I am indicating who is in this category at the end of this paragraph by marking a **RED CROSS** in the box. Anyone with a red cross in the box will be deleted from the Mailing List, if a cheque is not received by the end of February 1992.

**Your subscription is outstanding, please remit \$10.00.**



WAS IT '1/5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>' OR '1/3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>'?

Malcolm Montgomery chided me for stating in the last newsletter on page 6 that he had misread the Canadian postage due, and provided the following comment with the request that I print it as received:

### EXCHANGE RATES SHOULD CARRY A GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING

Our Chairman and Editor has raised an interesting point in his comment that I have 'misread' the '1/5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>' manuscript mark illustrated in the last Newsletter, and his suggestion that the mark is '1/3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>' in line with the 1.111:1.0 Currency/Sterling conversion of 1843. I started from that position, but was more influenced by the printing of two adhesives (1855 & 1857) following the transAtlantic rate reductions of 1854. The sevenpence halfpenny Currency (sixpence Sterling) and tenpence Currency (eightpence Sterling) stamps suggest such a major shift in exchange rates, 1.25:1.0, this is not rounding-up, that I find it difficult to believe that the other examples of the '1/5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>' mark that exist are not deliberate, and that the illustrated mark is anything more exciting than an example of bad handwriting.

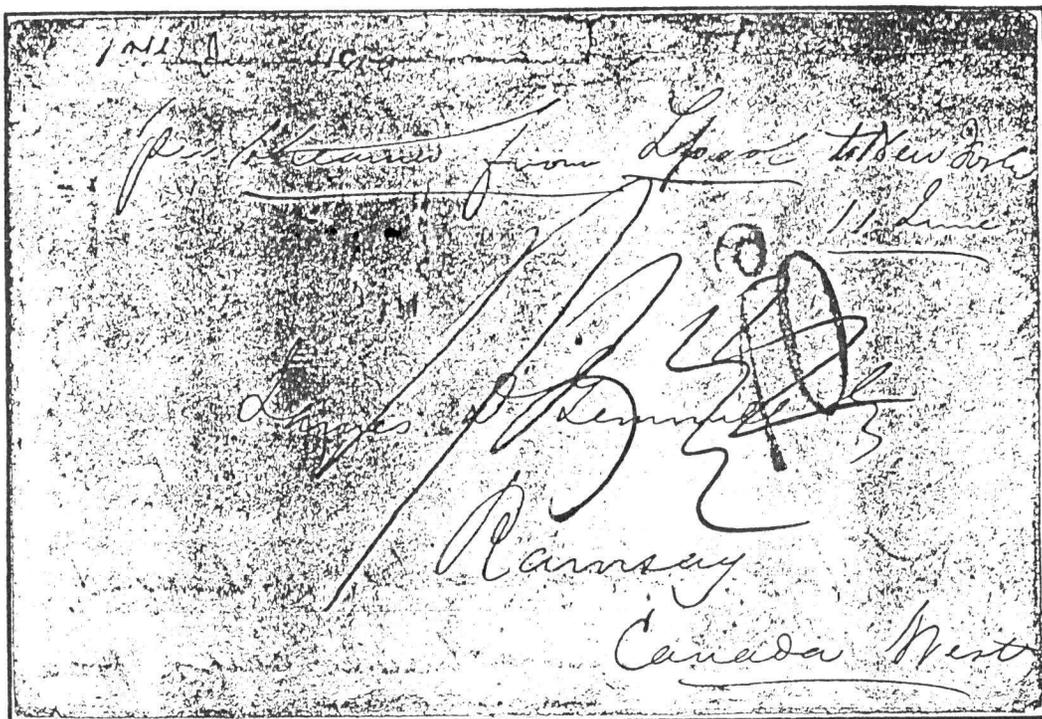
The one and twopence Sterling that was due on the letter is, in a sense, no more than the sum of those two rates (although the sixpence was a fine) and it would seem fanciful to suppose that the Postmaster would revert to an old conversion.

Unfortunately I have no statutory evidence to prove the post-1854 exchange rate (or the exchange rate for the Maritime Provinces, in particular Prince Edward Island, where the exchange was 1.5:1.0, or Newfoundland, rate unknown), but only evidence of practice, and it would be helpful if your readers could supply references.

One further point, and I am choosing my words carefully here lest I destroy my own case, I have long been puzzled by the anomolous [*sic*] situation pertaining to letters to and from Canada carried by United States Packets. The rate was one shilling and twopence Sterling – yet long after the introduction of the contradictory adhesives, in Canada such letters were charged one shilling and fourpence Currency, the old exchange rate (1s 2d = 14d Stg x 1.111 = 15.554d Cy = 1s 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d (rounded up to 1s 4d Cy). Again, references would be helpful. Once it reopens, I will visit the British Post Office

Archives to see what correspondence, if any, survives on the British aspects of the exchange rates saga.

I would welcome any comments from any of the more knowledgeable group members of their interpretation of the manuscript marking, which is reproduced again below. I still think it is '1/3<sup>1</sup>/2' because of the form of the number. In every case of a manuscript '5' that I have, there is always the top horizontal added separately to the main body of the figure, as illustrated in the contemporary letter from Glasgow, where the conversion from the 1/2 Stg. was to 1/5 Cy.

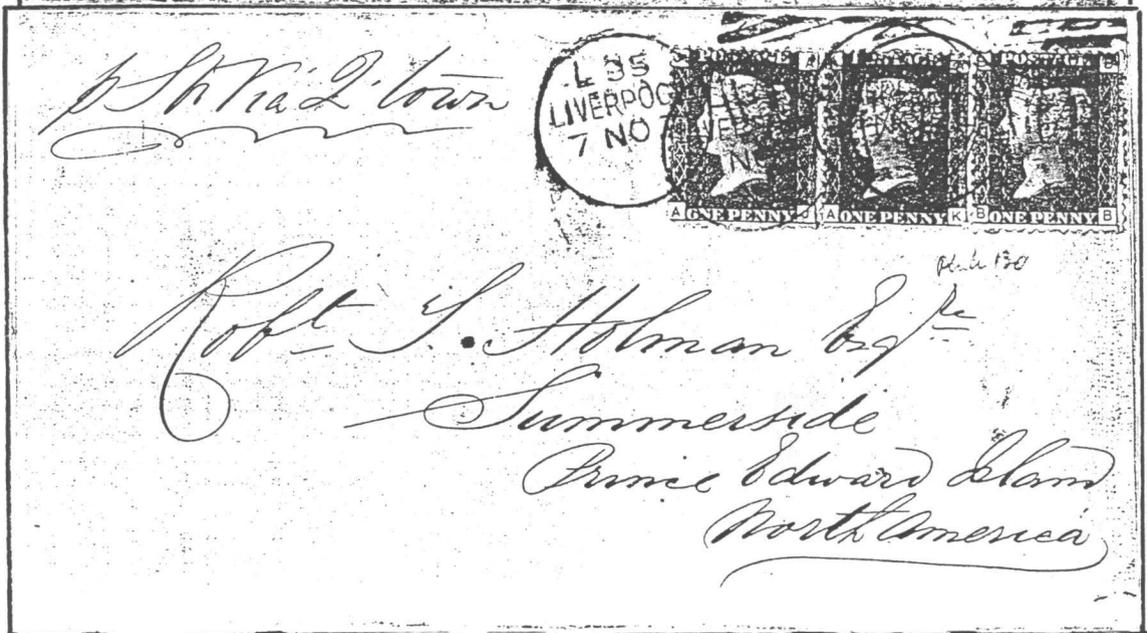


In his letter accompanying the above comment, Malcolm made a second more general one. 'We do not seem to progress a theme as consistently as we might, and that we should be more rigorous in our pursuit of all the details of a subject – nor do we seek to publish the final result as a stand-alone paper (excepting the special case of the "Handbook", which is rather different).' Nothing would please me more than to be able to do what he suggests, but so far, for the most part, the 'WE' is 'I' and I cannot do this alone. 'We' were able to do some follow-up on the 'PD', 'P.F.', etc. on French letters as a result of comments from several group members—I found this very satisfying. Let's do the same on the above problem!

NOT INLAND WATER DELIVERY

Jim Lehr wrote to me recently seeking information about the Queenstown, Ireland calls by the Cunard transatlantic steamers to and from Liverpool. He sent me an album page with two covers presumed to be both examples of the use of a coastal steamer to carry mail be-

tween Charlottetown and Summerside, Prince Edward Island. The second cover had been questioned by a show judge as to whether his interpretation of the 'p Str' direction on the cover was correct.



As this is a subject which has not been touched on before, I am including both covers, event though the first one is strictly a local PEI letter, because it is something that might be found on a transatlantic cover, although to date I have not heard of one. On the page, Jim

quoted from the 1860 PMG's Annual Report: 'A great advantage would be derived by having one steamer to ply between Shediac and Charlottetown twice in each week, calling at Summerside on her way up and down the Straits'. The first cover clearly shows that

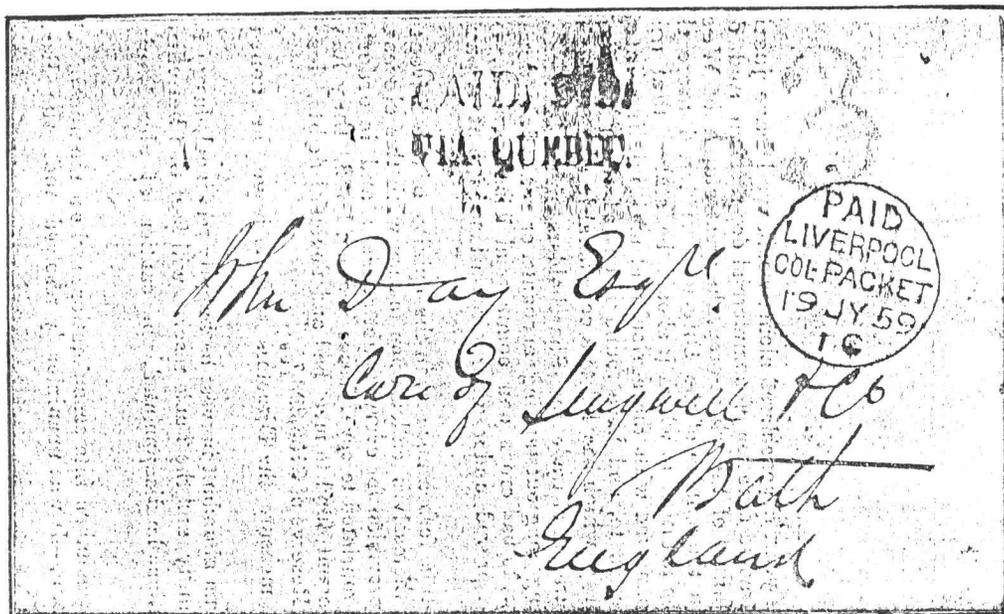
this method was used, as it was directed to go by the steamer *Prince Edward*.

The direction on the second cover was interpreted as: 'per Steamer via Charlottetown'—the old school copy book (copperplate) capital letter 'Q' being taken to be a capital 'C'—it was meant to indicate 'via Queenstown'. Having been taught to write by means of the traditional British copy books during my early Bermudian schooling, I have no trouble with this abbreviation, as I can still reproduce all the copperplate letters.

There is also another interesting thing to note about this cover. It was mailed in Liverpool on 7 November 1871, presumably after the *Cunard Palmyra* had sailed earlier in the day. The next transatlantic sailing from Liverpool was the *Allan Hibernian* two

days later. Assuming that the letter would go by the latter steamer, only 3d. in adhesives was put on it. Perhaps at the post office, it was realized that the night mail to Dublin had not closed, the Queenstown direction ('p Str Via Q'town') was added so that it would be sent to Ireland to connect with the *Palmyra*, when she called at Queenstown the following day. There is no indication of the additional 1d. postage required on letters in closed Canadian mails going through the United States. This was obviously overlooked, as no postage due was charged. The *Palmyra* arrived at Boston on 19 November, and the letter was backstamped at Charlottetown on the next day and at Summerside on 21 November, presumably having travelled the last leg on its journey overland.

### WHY THE 'PAID 3?'

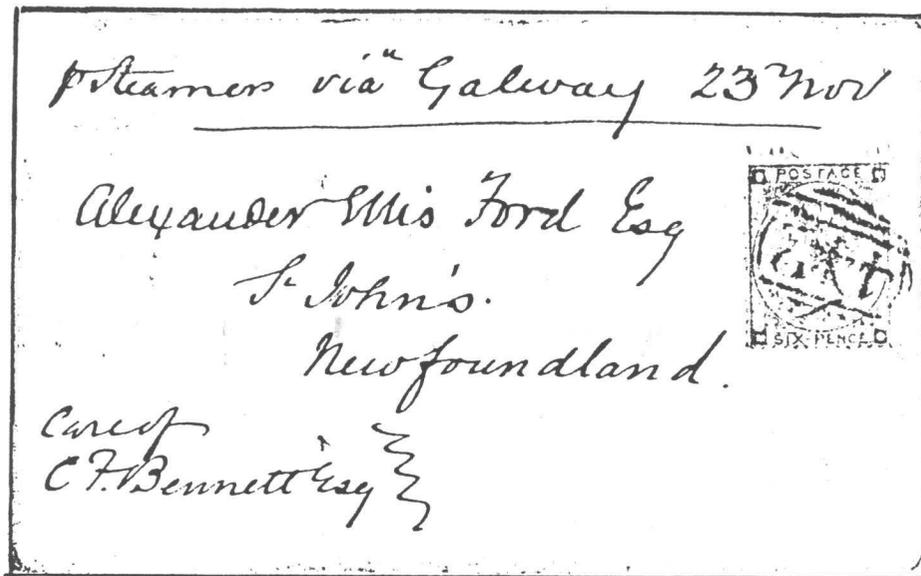


Illustrated is a printed newsletter of the Bank of Upper Canada, Toronto dated 25 June 1859, which was struck with a two-line bank date stamp: 'PAID 979/VIA QUEBEC'. It could not have been mailed until after 1 July, or it would have connected with the *Allan Anglo Saxon*, which sailed from Quebec on 2 July, instead it went on the *Nova Scotian* a week later, which arrived at Liverpool on 19 November.

As a result, it would have been handled at the Toronto post office within the first few days of decimal currency, and there was obviously no handstamp to show the correct 2-cent printed circular rate. As the postage was charged to an account, I have concluded that the postmaster, rationalizing that the important thing was to mark the circular 'PAID' and the amount was irrelevant, used the now-obsolete 'PAID 3' inland currency rate handstamp. Please send me your comments.

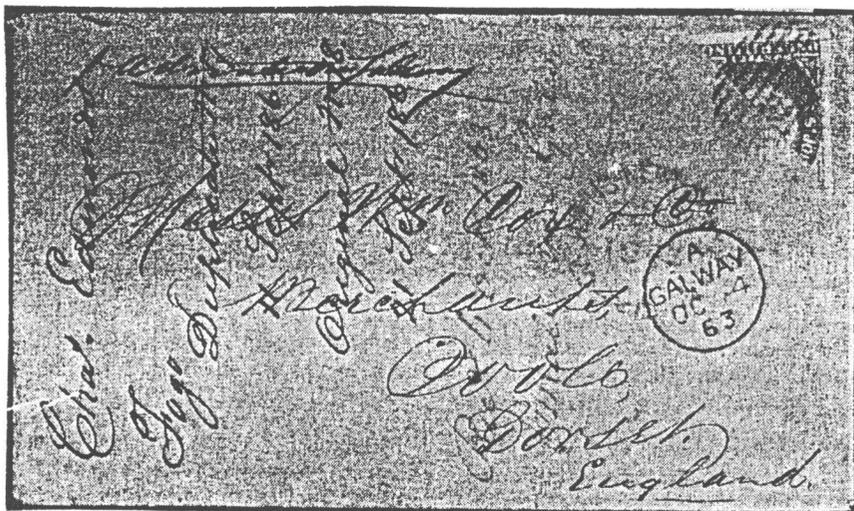
# GALWAY LINE TO NEWFOUNDLAND

After reading about Allan Steinhart's 'Almost Galway Line' cover in the September newsletter (No. 24 - 3), Maggie Toms sent along a photocopy of one of her former covers, which was carried by a Galway Line steamer.



She did not indicate where it was from, but the '442' numerical cancellation is of the English type and Brummell lists it as Bude, Cornwall. There is a partial backstamp of 21 November 1863, with the name around the top missing. The letter was directed to go via Galway on 23 November. The Galway *Columbia* left Liverpool on 20 November on the third of her four voyages and called at Galway on 24 November. She arrived at St. John's on 6 December and the St. John's datestamp on the back of the letter confirms that it had travelled by this route.

Coincidentally, Allan Steinhart had resurrected an item which appeared in the July-August 1952 issue of *B.N.A. Topics*. This described a letter which travelled in the opposite direction. Bill Lea, a study group member, had sent the photograph that was used at that time and it is reproduced from *Topics* here.



The Galway *Adriatic* departed from New York on 22 September 1863 on her fourth voyage of six made for the Galway Line. She called at St. John's on 27 September to pick up the mail and arrived at Galway on 4 October, where the letter was datestamped and forwarded to Poole. The article noted that this was the only known example of a bisected 1/- rose adhesive existing on a full cover. Can anyone add to this?

## ILLEGAL CARRIAGE OF LETTERS ON CUNARD STEAMERS

The British Post Office always maintained that it alone had the right to carry the Mails and embodied this principle in successive Post Office Acts. While some exceptions were made, such as letters carried by a friend; one group that was specially included in the prohibition were 'Passengers or other Persons on board any such Ships, Vessels, Steam Boat, Passage or Packet Boat'. The 'such' in the above would have included the Cunard steamers.

In the days of the high postage rates, the number of letters sent illicitly was large, as merchants would send bundles of letters privately to forwarding agents at ports such as New York and Liverpool, who would in turn give them to a sailing packet captain to carry across the Atlantic.

With the coming of steam and the large increase in correspondence, the practice certainly continued. In January 1843, Thomas Stayner, deputy postmaster general for the Canadas, wrote to London that

notwithstanding the very considerable number of letters thus sent thro' the Mail - I am persuaded that an equal number at least (notwithstanding the present low rate of postage) is sent clandestinely by passengers - via Boston and New York to Liverpool - more especially from the Cities of Montreal, Kingston and Toronto. It is well known that Travellers by that Route carry Portmanteaux filled with letters. I understand that many of the largest Mercantile Establishments send all their letters in this way. - How the letters escape discovery and seizure at Liverpool and London I cannot tell.

When this was referred to the Liverpool postmaster, he replied that there were notices in every cabin relating to the penalties for conveying letters and requiring that any such be delivered to the Admiralty Officer in charge of the Mail on each steamer; and that 300-600 letters are recovered each trip. As to portmanteaux of letters, he discounted this on the grounds that the Customs examine all luggage and packages of arriving passengers. The Custom House was equally certain that few, if any, letters got past them.

This prompted the secretary of the Post Office to comment to the postmaster general 'that Mr Stayner's suspicions as to the extent to which the illegal conveyance of

Letters from the Canadas is carried on must be unfounded'.

I have several examples of letters carried illegally—one apparently intercepted and charged as a packet letter on arrival at Liverpool and another mailed there with the postage unpaid and charged 2d. postage due at London.

In this connection, Bob Parsons has sent along a column from the Kingston, Ontario *British Whig* newspaper of 30 August 1844 about an attempt to get a parcel of letters on a steamer after sailing. This was a far more extreme way of getting letters to a passenger illegally than anything I have read elsewhere. It follows below.

SMUGGLING OF LETTERS - The following is an extract from a letter in the Boston *Atlas*, dated Liverpool, August 4:-

'I have frequently cautioned passengers by the royal mail steamers not to take charge of any letters, as each letter conveyed out of the mail is subject to a heavy penalty. From an incident that took place when the *Caledonia* left this port, 19th ult., it will be seen that persons will run great risks, and all for the sake of saving a few

shillings. The royal mail steamers are always off in the Mersey on the day of their departure, the distance from the pier head being some two miles, more or less. At the appointed hour a small steamer is always provided, to take first the passengers and their baggage, and afterward return for the Government mails.

When the *Caledonia* was about to depart, I left the dock in the small steamer, to see several of my friends, who were on board bound for Boston. After the mail bags were all on board, we re-embarked for the shore, and the mail steamer had got under way, when, a few rods distant from her, a boat rowed by four men was seen to head for the *Caledonia*. The Messrs. M'Iver, the agents of the company here, and proprietors of stock to a large amount, were on board the small steamer with me, and they at once suspected that it was the intention of some persons to convey on board the *Caledonia* a parcel of letters. They immediately ordered the captain to put about, and go alongside the *Caledonia*.

In the mean time a parcel was thrown on board the *Caledonia*, but as the Messrs. M'Iver had made signs that it must not be received, it was thrown back into the boat; three times it was thrown up and returned, till finally some person took it and kept it. We had now got alongside and fastened to the steamer, and both were going along under full speed.

The small row boat had gone off. The brothers M'Iver immediately jumped on board the *Caledonia*, and commenced a strict search for the parcel, assisted by Capt. Lott, mail agent, the purser, and others. The greatest excitement prevailed on board among the numerous passengers, who were, however, at the time, ignorant of the facts. The search continued for some fifteen or twenty minutes, during which time we were driving on at a furious rate.

At length the brothers M'Iver returned from the search, having been successful in finding the parcel. It had a brown wrapper on the outside addressed to a passenger, but underneath this was a thick white wrapper with the address of a well known firm in New York.—This was torn open at the end, and a large number of *letters* were discovered inside. They were probably very important letters, but they were detained by the Messrs. M'Iver, and it is probable that the detention will prove a serious affair to the parties who attempted this bold and very impudent method of sending the package. I have given you these facts, that other persons may take warning not to send letters out of the regular mail.'

**Book Review – THE POSTAGE RATES OF THE NORTH AMERICAN MAILS (1625-1950)**  
by Malcolm B. Montgomery, MBE Published by the author, 1991

This volume is subtitled 'The Inland and Ocean Postage Rates Applied to Letters Between The United Kingdom and North America'. It consists of thirty pages of narrative summarizing the changes which occurred in the transmittal of transatlantic mails and the corresponding postage rates in the successive centuries, and three appendices of detail. The first appendix of 156 pages is divided into five time periods, each of which is subdivided into sections giving inland postage rates, ship letter and packet rates applicable in the United Kingdom and North America. The second appendix of thirty-eight pages has tables showing the changes in inland postage vs. distance, together with the ship letter and packet rate changes with successive Post Office Acts. Finally, there is a four-page bibliography as the third appendix.

Probably the greatest value of this book lies in the fact that the author has brought together information which has appeared in various monographs published over the past thirty to forty years, although most of the data is from books published in the past decade. It therefore provides a single source for use in determining the various components of postage that made up the total charged on a letter. It was this problem that led to this book, for as Montgomery wrote in a letter to me:

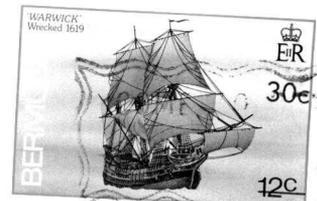
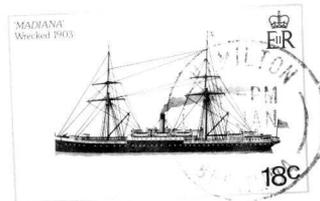
I first started collecting trans-Atlantic postal history some twenty years ago; at the time I found difficulty in attributing a valid authority for many of the descriptions of my covers for, although a fair amount of reference literature was available, the sources of some of the information were often lacking. I began to keep my own notes, concentrating on postage rates, since that seemed to be the area that had received least attention.

I tried to be meticulous in maintaining details of the sources; wherever possible I recorded primary and secondary sources. . . , and details of books and other references that explained the original interpretations.

His notes formed the basis of this book, but nevertheless, in an attempt to ensure accuracy, he asked a number of the leading collectors of transatlantic mail to review the manuscript. This is certainly a book which should be in the library of every transatlantic mail collector. It is available from the author, 26 Cambridge Road, Southampton, SO2 0RD, England for £16.00 plus £4.50 (surface) or £10.00 (air) postage.

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