

GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE COLONIAL SCHOOLS (1)

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Education has been called America's religion. Today about 60 million Americans are attending school. One half of all the people in the country between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five are enrolled in either a college or university; close to 50 million boys and girls are going to school. Education is an enormous (and expensive) part of American life; its size is matched by its variety.

Differences in American schools compare with those found in the majority of other countries lie in the fact that education there has long been intended for everyone--not just for a privileged elite. Schools are expected to meet the needs of every child, regardless of ability, and also of society itself. This means that tax-supported public schools offer more than academic subjects. It surprises many people when they go there to find high schools offering such courses as typing, sewing, radio repair, computer programming, or driver training, along with traditional academic subjects such as mathematics, history, and languages. Students choose their curricula from a tremendous "smorgasbord" of courses, depending on their interests, future goals, and level of ability. The underlying goal of American education is to develop every child to the utmost of his (her) own possibilities, however great or small these may be, and to give each one a sense of civic and community consciousness.

Because there is no national religion and because there are so many different backgrounds and origins among the people, schools have traditionally been an important part of the national unity, playing a vital part in "Americanizing" the millions of immigrants who poured into the country in earlier years. Schools still play a vital part in the community life, especially in small towns.

This essay aims to set forth in some detail and discuss the general character of the colonial schools.

(1) Rules and Regulations for the Government of the New Haven Hopkins Grammar School

The following rules and regulations for this early Connecticut grammar school are very interesting as showing the religious purpose of the instruction, the dependence upon town and dame schools for preliminary training for admission, and the plan of government and instruction in the school.

Orders of ye Committee of Trustees for the Grammar School at New Haven

to be observed and attended in ye said Schoole, made, agreed upon and published in ye sd Schoole in ye Yeare 1684.

1. The Erection of ye sd Schoole being principally for ye institution of hopeful youth in ye Latin tongue, and other learned Languages soe far as to prepare such youths for ye Colledge and publique service of ye Country in Church, & Commonwealth. The Chiefe work of ye School Mr. is to Instruct all such youth as are or may be by their parents or Friends sent, or Committed unto him to yt end with all diligence faithfulness and Constancy out of any ye townes of this County to New haven upon his sallary accompt only, otherwise Gratis. And if any Boyes are sent to ye Mr of ye said Schoole from any other part of ye Colony, or Country,

Each such boy or youth to pay ten shillings to ye Mastr at or upon his entrance into ye said Schoole.

2. That noe Boyes be admitted into ye sd Schoole for ye learning of English Books, but such as have been before taught to spell ye letters well & begin to Read, thereby to perfect their right Spelling, & Reading, or to learne to write, & Cypher for numeracion, & addicion, & noe further, & yt all other too young & not instructed in letters & spelling, & all Girles be others either too young & not instructed in letters & spelling, & all Girles be excluded as Improper & inconsistent with such a Grammar Schoole as ye law injoines, as is ye Designe of this Settlement, And yt noe Boyes be admitted from other townes for ye learning of English, without liberty & specially licence from ye Comitte.

3. That the Master & Schollars duly attend the Schoole Houres viz, from 6 in ye morning to 11 o Clock in ye forenoone, And from 1 a Clock in the afternone to 5 a Clock in the afternoone in Summer & 4 in Winter.

4. That the Mr shall make a list or Catalogue of his Schollars names And appoint a Monitor in his turne fore one week or longer tyme as the Mr shall see Cause, who shall every morning & noone et at least once a day at ye set tyme Call over ye names of ye Schollars anf Note down the Late Commers, or Absent, And in fit season Call such to an accompt That the faulty, & truants may be Corrected or reproved, as their fault shall desearve.

5. That the Schollars being called together the Mr shall every morning begin his work with a short Prayer for a blessing on his Laboures & their Learning.

6. That the prayer being ended the Master shall Assigne to every of his Schollars their places of Sitting according to their degrees of learning. And that (having their Parts, or Lessons appointed them) they keep their Seates, & stir not out of Doors, with(out) Leave of the Master, and not above two at one tyme, & soe successively: unless in Cases of necessity.

7. That ye Schollars behave themselves at all tymes, especialy in Schoole tyme with due Reverence to their Master, & with Sobriety & quietnes among themselves, without fighting, Quarreling or calling one another or any others, bad names, or using bad words in Cursing, taking the name of God in vaine, or other prophane, obscene, or Corrupt speeches which if any doe, That ye Mr Forthwith give them due Correccion. And if any prove incorrigible in such bad manners & wicked Corrupting language & speeches, notwithstanding formr warnings, admonishions & Correccion that such be expelled ye Schoole as pernicious & dangerous examples to ye Rest.

8. That if any of ye Schoole Boyes be observed to play, sleep, or behave themselves rudely, or irreverently, or be any way disorderly at meeting on ye Saboath Days or any other tyme of ye Publique worships of God That upon informacion or Complaint thereof to ye due Conviccion of the offender or offenders, The Master shall give them due Correccions to ye degree of ye Offence. And yt all Coreccions be wth Moderacion.

9. That noe Latttine Boyes be allowed upon any pretence (sickness, and disability excepted) to withdraw, or absent themselves from the Schoole, without liberty graunted by the Master, and yt noe such libertry be granted but upon ticket from ye Parents or friend's & on grounds sufficient as in Cases extraordinary or absolute necessity.

10. That all the Lattin Schollars, & all other of ye Boyes of Competent age and Capacity give the Mr an accompt of one passage or sentence at least of ye sermons the foregoing Saboath on ye 2d day morning. And that from 1 to 3 in ye afternoon of every last day of ye week be

Improved by ye Mr in Catechizing of his Schollars ye are Capeable.¹

(2) Schoolmaster Contracts in Massachusetts Town

Two early Massachusetts town contracts with teachers are illustrative of early conditions are compensation.

In 1658 the selectmen of the town of Dedham: it is agreed being met to agree with Michael Metcalf for keeping school: it is agreed mutually that the said Michael shall attend the keeping of the school in our town at the schoolhouse the ensuing year, or so long as God shall enable him, and teach such male children as shall be sent to him by any inhabitant to read and write English, provided that if any inhabitant shall take any child or children to that end to send them to school, it shall be at liberty of the schoolmaster to refuse such, except they agree with him to his satisfaction, and further it is mutually agreed that if the weather be extreme and unfit to travel, then he shall keep the school at his own house until the season be more temperate.

In consideration whereof, we, the selectmen, do agree that he shall receive £20 sterling, the one half in wheat and the other half in Indian or rye, all being merchantable, at the end of each half year ten pounds, that is five pounds in wheat and five pounds in other corn, the wheat at the baker's current price in Dedham, other corn as it go current, from man to man, and in case of doubtfulness of price the selectmen shall settle the price at the end of each half year: the corn is to be delivered at the house of said Michael Metcalf. And it is further agreed that he shall be required no more highway work but only one day's work of one man and a team, and one day more of a man. And no advantage shall be taken to discount for not attending the school except it be discontinued a full week together.

In the town of Hingham the following agreement was drawn up and signed, in 1670: This memorandum is to certify those whom it may concern, that the selectmen of Hingham have indented Henry Smith, as followeth: The said Henry Smith engageth that with care and diligence he will teach and instruct until a year be expired in Latin, Greek, and English, in writing and arithmetic, such youths of the inhabitants of Hingham as shall for the forementioned sciences be sent into their school. And the said selectmen whose names are subscribed do on the behalf of the town of Hingham promise and engage that the foresaid Henry Smith for his encouragement and pains shall have £24 proportionally paid him at the end of each quarter of the foresaid annual term, in good merchantable corn at the price current. The species are wheat, rye, barley, pease, and Indian, whereof a third or second is to be Indian corn. The foresaid year is to begin on the first of February, 1670 and to end on the last January, 1671. The said Henry Smith is to have a fortnight time allowed him for a journey out if the year above said.²

(3) Rules Regulating a Schoolmaster in New Amsterdam

The following instructions given Evert Pietersen, a schoolmaster employed in New Amsterdam in 1661, by the public authorities, are probably typical of those given other schoolmasters. They are reproduced as showing the nature and the fee basis of the Dutch elementary schools.

Instructions and Rules for Schoolmaster Evert Pietersen, drawn up by the Burgomasters of this city with advice of the Director General and Council.

1. He shall take good care, that the children, coming to his school, do so at the usual hour, namely at eight in the morning and one in the afternoon.

2. He must keep good discipline among his pupils.
3. He shall teach the children and pupils the Christian Prayers, commandments, baptism, Lord's supper, and the questions with answers of the catechism, which are taught here every Sunday afternoon in the church.
4. Before school closes he shall let the pupils sing some verses and a psalm.
5. Besides his yearly salary he shall be allowed to demand and receive from every pupil quarterly as follows: For each child, whom he teaches the a b c, spelling and reading, 30 styvers, for teaching to read write, 50 st.; for teaching to read, write, and cipher, 60 st.; from those who come in the evening and between times pro rate a fair sum. The poor and needy, who makes to be taught for God's sake he shall teach for nothing.
6. He shall be allowed to demand and receive from everybody, who makes arrangements to come to his school and comes before the first half of the quarter preceding the first of December next, the school dues for the quarter, but nothing from those, who come after the first half of the quarter.
7. He shall not take from anybody, more than is herein stated. Thus done and decided by the Burgomasters of the City of Amsterdam in N.N., November 4, 1661.

(4) Contract With a Dutch Schoolmaster, Flatbush, New York

Specific and very particular agreements were made by the Dutch with their early schoolmasters, as the following document of 1682 shows. It also reveals the multiple nature of the schoolmaster's duties--teacher, chorister, janitor, and sexton--and is of importance as showing the elementary schoolmaster in the process of evolution out of the church sexton.

School Service.

- I. The school shall begin at eight o'clock, and go out at eleven; and in the afternoon shall begin at one o'clock and end at four. The bell shall be rung when the school commences.
- II. When the school begins, one of the children shall read the morning prayer, as it stands in the catechism, and close with the prayer before with prayer before dinner; in the afternoon it shall begin with the prayer after and end with the evening prayer. The evening school shall begin with Lord's prayer, and close by singing a psalm.
- III. He shall instruct the children on every Wednesday and Saturday, in the common prayers, and the questions and answers in the catechism, to enable them to repeat them the better on Sunday before the afternoon service, or on Monday, when they shall be catechised before the congregation.

Upon all such occasions, the schoolmaster shall be present, and shall require the children to be friendly in their appearance and encourage them to answer freely and distinctly.

- IV. He shall be required to keep his school nine months in succession, from September to June, in each year, in case it should be concluded upon to retain his service for a year or more, or without limitation; and he shall then be required to be regulated by these articles, and to perform the same duties which his predecessor, Jan Thibaud, above named, was required to perform. In every particular therefore, he shall be required to keep school, according to this seven months agreement, and shall always be present himself.

Church Service

- I. He shall keep the church clean, and ring the bell three times before the people assemble to attend the preaching and catechism. Also before the sermon is commenced, he shall read a chapter out of the Holy Scriptures, and that, between the second and third ringing of the bell.

After the third ringing he shall read the ten commandments, and the twelve articles of our faith, and then take the lead in singing. In the afternoon after the third ringing of the bell, he shall read a short chapter, or one of the Psalms of David, as the congregation are assembling; and before divine service commences, shall introduce it, by the singing of a Psalm or Hymn.

II. When the minister shall preach at Brooklyn, or New-Utrecht, he shall be required to read twice before the congregation, from the book commonly used for that purpose. In the afternoon he shall also read a sermon on the explanation of the catechism, according to the usage and practice approved of by the minister. The children as usual, shall recite their questions and answers out of the catechism, on Sunday, and he shall instruct them therein. He, as chorister, shall not be required to perform these duties, whenever divine service shall be performed in Flatlands, as it would be unsuitable, and prevent many from attending there.

III. For the administration of Holy Baptism, he shall provide a basin with water, for which he shall be entitled to receive from the parents, or witnesses, twelve styvers. He shall, at the expense of the church, provide bread and wine, for the celebration of the Holy Supper: He shall be in duty bound promptly to furnish the minister with the name of the child to be baptized, and with names of parents and witnesses. And he shall also serve as messenger for the consistory.

IV. He shall give the funeral invitations, dig the grave, and toll the bell, for which service he shall receive for a person of fifteen years and upwards, twelve guilders, and for one under that age, eight guilders. If he should be required to give invitations beyond the limits of the town, he shall be entitled to three additional guilders, for the invitation of every other town, and if he should be required to cross the river, and go to New York, he shall receive four guilders.

School Money

He shall receive from those who attend the boy school, for a speller or reader, three guilders a quarter, and for a writer four guilders. From those who attend evening school, for a speller or reader, four guilders, and for a writer, six guilders shall be given.

Salary

In addition to the above, his salary shall consist of four hundred guilders, in grain, valued in Seewant, to be delivered at Brooklyn Ferry, and for his services from October to May, as above stated, a sum of two hundred and thirty-four guilders, in the same kind, with dwelling-house, barn, pasture lot and meadows, to the school appertaining. The same to take effect from the first day of October, instant.

Done and agreed upon in Consistory, under the inspection of the Honorable Constable and Overseers, the 8th, of October, 1682

Constable and Overseers

CORNELIUS BARRIAN,
RYNIER AERTSEN,
JAN REMSEN,

The Consistory

CASPARUS VAN ZUREN, MINISTER
ADRIAEN REYERSE,
CORNELIS BARENT VANDWYCK

I agree to the above articles, and promise to perform them according to the best of my ability.

JOHANNES VAN ECKKELEN,

(5) Contract with Minister to teach an English Grammar School

When the town of Newburg (formerly the Dutch town of Quessing) was given English letters patent, in March 26, 1752, certain glebe lands were set aside, as follows:

For the proper use, benefit, and behalf of a minister of the church of England as by law established to have the cure of souls, of the aforesaid tract of 2,190 acres of land, and of a schoolmaster to teach and instruct the children of the aforesaid inhabitants and their successors forever, and to no other use whatever.

It is known that a school was maintained here continuously from 1760 to the Revolution. In 1790 the following agreement was made with the Rev. Mr. Sperin, as combined minister and teacher.;

The Trustees Agreed that the Reverend George H. Sperin shall be entitled to receive the whole of the rents and benefits arising from the Glebe lands, while he continues to officiate as minister, and teaching the inhabitants of the German patent, on the following terms, viz.: Reading Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, History, and English Grammar at 12 shillings per quarter; Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic at 8 shillings per quarter.

Provided always that no children incapable of studying the above branches shall be admitted or received into the school.

And should a poor child come properly recommended as such, he shall be received into the English school gratis.

And if a youth of strong natural ability of the like description offer, he shall be received into the Classical school, also gratis.

Provided also that should the rents and privileges of the Glebe hereafter become more valuable, that then, in such cases, the terms of teaching the children living in the patent shall be reduced in such manner as to be equivalent to said advantages, so far as may relate towards supporting of a school and as the trustees shall deem proper. 6

(6) Learning the Trade of a Schoolmaster

The following indenture of apprenticeship, under date of 1722, indicates that the very common apprenticeship method of training was even used, though probably frequently, in preparing boys to become schoolmasters.

Registered for MR. George Brownell Schoolmaster
ye 18th day of July 1722.

This Indenture Wittnesseth that John Campbel Son of Robert Campbell of the City of New York with the Consent of his father and mother hath put himself and by these presents doth Voluntarily put and bind himself Apprentice to George Brownell of the Same City Schoolmaster to learn the Art Trade or Mystery and with the Said George Brownell to Serve from the twenty ninth day of May one thousand seven hundred and twenty one for and during the Term of ten years and three Month to be Compleat and Ended During all which term the said Apprentice his said Master and Mistress faithfully Shall Serve their Secrets keep and Lawfull Commands gladly everywhere obey he Shall do no damage to his said Master or Mistress nor suffer it to be done by others without Letting or Giving Notice thereof to his said Master or Mistress he shall not Waste his said Master or Mistress Goods or Lend them Unlawfully to any he shall not Committ fornication nor Contract Matrimony within the Said Term at Cards Dice or any other unlawfull Game he shall not Play: he Shall not absent himself by Day or by night from his Master or Mistress Service without their Leave; nor haunt Alehouses Taverns or Playhouses but in all things behave himself as a faithfull Apprentice ought to Do towards his said Master or Mistress during the Said Term. And the said George Brownell Doth hereby Covenant and Promise to teach and Instruct or Cause the said Apprentice

to be taught and Instructed in the Art Trade or Calling of a Schoolmaster by the best way or means he or his wife may or can if the Said Apprentice be Capable to Learn and to find and Provide unto the Said Apprentice sufficient meat Drink Apparel Lodging and washing fitting for an Apprentice during the Said Term: and at the Expiration thereof to give unto the Said Apprentice one Suit of Cloth new Consisting of a coat vest coat and Breeches also one New hatt Six New Shirts Three pair of Stockings one pair of New Shoes Suitable for his said Apprentice. In Testimony Whereof the Parties to these Presents have hereunto Interchangeably Sett their hands and Seals the third day of August in the Eighth year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George King of Great Brittain &c. Anno domini One thousand seven hundred and Twenty-One. John Campbel. Signed Sealed and Delivered in the presence of Mary Smith Cornelius Kiersted Memorandum Appeared before before me John Cruger Esq. Alderman and One of his Majesties Justices of the Peace for this City and County. John Compbell and Acknowledged the within Indenture to be his Voluntary Act and Deed New York the 9th April 1722.

John Cruger 7

(7) Description of a Late Eighteenth-Century Schoolhouse

The following description of the schoolhouses found in New Rochelle, New York, in the period from 1791-1796, probably is descriptive of many of the schoolbuildings of the time.

The inside of these schoolhouses was of the crudest and cheapest finish.

As to the outside, they were small, unpainted shanties, usually located on some surplus angle of the streets or rocky land, unfit cultivation, thus economizing round and making these barren spots, where no vegetation could grow, produce the precious fruits of education. The houses were ceiled round with unpainted boards, shrunken from their grooves; consequently no ventilators were needed. Their fixtures were extremely rude and simple, consisting for the most part of pine boards nailed up to the sides and ends of the room for desks, and sometimes a shelf underneath on which to keep books and slates. They were furnished with seats of long oaken slabs, with legs driven into auger holes at each end, and all of the fixtures and furniture were curiously notched and carved into many fantastic and grotesque images by the busy jack knives of the mischievous tyros. The schoolroom was sometimes warmed by a fire in an open fireplace at the end of the room, but mostly by a small cast-iron stove set upon a pile of bricks in the middle of the room.⁸

(8) Content, Method, and Spirit of the Late Eighteenth Century School

The close of the eighteenth century found schools, and particularly elementary schools, in a sad condition. The War for Independence had destroyed many schools, and impaired the ability to maintain others. Such schools as remained in general were poorly housed and taught, and textbooks were few and poor. The following picture of the content, method, and spirit of the elementary schools, compiled from source materials, gives a good view of the instruction then provided.

(a) *Content.* The school session was short — very short; attendance was intermittent; teachers frequently were incompetent; the benefits of a class recitation were not realized, and consequently the acquirements of the scholars were limited. After attendance at school for a few winters, pupils gained a tolerable proficiency in reading, writing, and ciphering through the “rule of three.” Under the conditions, this was no mean accomplishment, but those who secured what was called at that time a “good English education” gained much more. Arithmetic included, besides arithmetic proper, a smattering of elementary science, inventional

geometry, and the mathematical side of astronomy. The reading material included valuable but most uninteresting supplementary geographical, and political information. Geography, itself, included history, an elementary discussion of astronomy, civil government, and much miscellaneous information on a wide range of topics. Geography was, like reading, a general information subject. There was, during this period, tremendous emphasis on what Bingham called the "ornamental and useful art of eloquence." This is a case of a clear response of the curriculum to the social demands of the time.

(b) *The Method.* While much might be said in favor of the curriculum, especially as contrasted with the isolated character of the modern course of study, little or nothing can be said in favour of the method, for, in the first place, it was utterly mechanical. The method of the solution of the chronological problem, given by Pike, is one illustration of this mechanical process. The progress of the spelling book on the mere basis of the length of the words or number of syllables, is so much more evidence of this. The catechetical method—the method of Dilworth, of Morse, and of Webster—is the expression, from another viewpoint, of this mechanical character. There was no searching of the mind on the part of the pupils; no attempt to formulate problem; no expression of individual opinion; no contributions from the various members of the class—none of the advantages of the modern recitation.

The pupils came up to the teacher: the teacher took the book, asked the appropriate question, to which the pupil gave as dutifully and as mechanically the set reply. It need only to be named to be perceived that this mechanical, catechetical, individual method placed the emphasis on Memory, which means ultimately, "words, words, words."

(c) *The Spirit.* One thing apart from the method and content of the education provided strikes one forcibly while reflecting on these texts: it is that there is here consciously the attempt to embody the new spirit of American life—call it what you will, a new patriotism, democracy, or Americanism. Here is conscious, mental revolt—as conscious as the political one. Pike thought that since the United States had become an independent nation, a system (of Arithmetic) might be calculated "more suitable to our meridian than those heretofore published." Likewise, Bingham announces in his preface that preference is to be given to the publications of American genius. But in Webster this spirit is strongest. The preceding textbooks are condemned because they are not specially designed for American schools. And it is declared—such heretical doctrine—that the Revolutionary orations are not inferior in any respect to the orations of Cicero and Demosthenes. This result, the new democratic spirit, extends in Webster's case even further: it extends to the Latin domination of the English language as opposed to the language of the people. The sentences on this subject, in the preface to part two of the Institute, are emphatic and virile. The Lidley Murray domination would never have been, had Webster gained the day, but here tradition and the opposing forces were too strong for him.

(9) How the School Day was Spent

The following, dealing with instruction, represents the first half of the Code.

1. *General*

Instructors and scholars, shall punctually attend their schools, in due season, and the appointed number of hours.

The whole time of instructors and scholars shall be entirely devoted to the proper business and duties of the school.

Every scholar shall be furnished with necessary books for his instruction. In winter, effectual provision ought to be made for warming the schoolhouse in season, otherwise the forenoon is almost lost.

The Bible—in selected portions—or the New Testament, ought, in Christian schools, to be read by those classes who are capable of reading decently, at the opening of the school before the morning prayer. If this mode of reading be adopted, it will remove every objection of irreverence, and answers all the purposes of morality, devotion, and reading. Some questions may be very properly and answered by the master or scholars: and five minute, thus spent, would be very profitable exercise of moral and other instruction.

Proper lessons, and fully within the scholar's power to learn, ought to be given to every class, each part of the day. These daily lessons ought to be faithfully learned and recited to the master, or his approved monitors.

One lesson in two or more days may be a review of the preceding lessons of those days, and one lesson in each week a review of the studies of that week. The sum of this review, fairly written or noted in the books studied, may be carried by the scholars, each Saturday, to their respective parents or guardians.

Scholars equal in knowledge ought to be classed together. Those whose progress merits advancement should rise to a higher class, and those who decline by negligence should be degraded.

2. *School hours and work.*

The hours of school ought, as much as possible, to be appropriated in the following, or similar manner, viz."

IN THE MORNING, the Bible may be delivered to the head each class, and by them to the scholars capable of reading decently or looking over. This reading, with some short remarks, or questions, with the morning prayer, may occupy the first half hour. The second, may be employed in hearing the morning lessons, while the younger classes are preparing to spell and read.

The *third* half hour in attention to the writers. The *fourth* in hearing the under classes read and spell. The *fifth* in looking over and assisting the writers and ciphers. The sixth in hearing the under classes spell and read the second time; and in receiving and depositing pens, writing and reading books.

In all exercises of reading the teacher ought to pronounce a part of the lessons, giving the scholars a correct example of accent and emphasis, pause, tones, and cadence. In all studies, the scholars ought to be frequently and critically observed. The teacher's eye on all his school is a great preservative of diligence and order.

IN THE AFTERNOON, the *first* half hour may be employed in spelling together, repeating grammar, rules of arithmetic, and useful tables, with a clear, and full, but soft voice, while the instructor prepares pens, writing books, & c as above. The second and third half hours in hearing the under classes and assisting the writers and ciphers. The fourth in hearing the upper classes read. The *fifth* to hearing the under classes read, and spell the second time. The *sixth* in receiving and depositing the books &c, as above. That the school be closed with an evening prayer, previous to which the scholars shall repeat a psalm or hymn--and also the Lord's prayer.

Saturdays may be wholly employed in an orderly review of the studies of the week,

excepting one hour appropriated to instruction in the first principles of religion and morality; and in repeating, together, the ten commandments. That the Catechism usually taught in schools be divided, by the master, into four sections, one of which shall be repeated successively on each Saturday.¹⁰

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