



Olmsted 200

Two Centuries and More History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township –
First Farmed in 1814 and Settled in 1815

Issue 126

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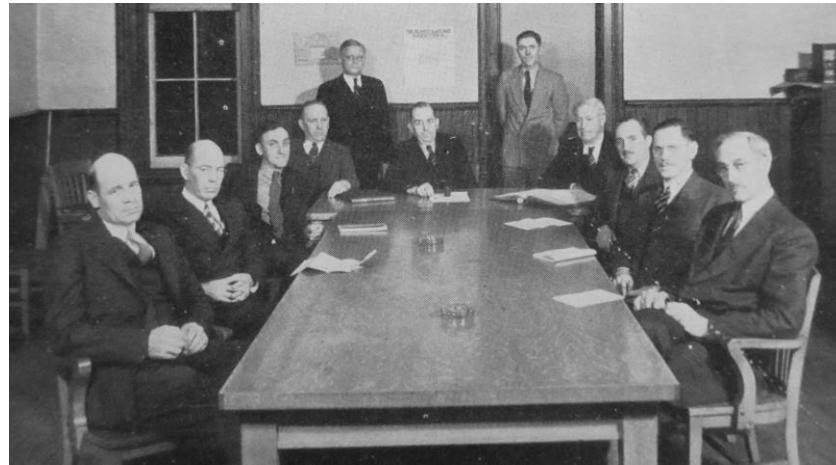
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Building Remains Testament to Charles Bonsey's Service

Forty years ago this month, Olmsted Falls city leaders realized it was time to honor a former mayor who played a big role in getting construction of an important building completed.

That man was Charles Bonsey, who served as mayor for three terms from 1940 through 1946 after serving as a councilman beginning in 1936. The building was very



In this photo of village officials from the souvenir program for the 1939 homecoming, Charles Bonsey was still a councilman. He sits second from the left. Mayor George Spaulding is the man seated in the center rear.

important at the time because it was the Olmsted Falls Village Hall. When Bonsey became mayor, it was only partly finished, and construction work was stalled. Olmsted Falls needed it not only to house the municipal government, including the mayor and council, but also the police station and the fire station. Today, that former Village Hall houses the restaurant

called the Moosehead Hoof and Ladder No. 3.

The former Town Hall was torn down in 1939, when Bonsey was still a councilman and not yet mayor, and it was long overdue to be replaced. It never was a good building. It began showing structural problems soon after it was constructed – and it caused political problems.

Olmsted Township officials decided to build it in 1882 for both their use and use by Olmsted Falls village officials. That was against the wishes of many people in the northern section of the township around Butternut Ridge, and the project was one of a series of factors that sowed division that eventually led to northern township residents' decision in 1908 to join with a small section of Dover Township to the north to form the Village of North Olmsted. Few people from Butternut Ridge showed up for the Town Hall's dedication ceremony on January 19, 1882. When a columnist from the *Berea Advertiser* asked Butternut Ridge resident D.K. Huntington about that, he denied that was a snub but indicated growing disaffection by him and his neighbors when he said that "this part of the township is 'opposed to everything' in which the south part of the township is interested." [For more on North Olmsted's split from Olmsted Township, see Issue 67 of *Olmsted 200* from December 2018.]

In December 1883 – less than one year after the Town Hall was dedicated – the township had to have new troughs installed because water was running off the front of the building instead of the rear, as had been intended. One year after that, the township trustees had an iron rod installed in the middle of the building "to prevent the walls from continuing on their outward course," as the *Advertiser* reported. In other words, the walls were bowing.

About the same time the iron rod was installed, the trustees had to fix a leak from the chimney, but that wasn't the end of the chimney problems. One day in January 1885, when the township clerk started a fire in the fireplace, smoke stayed inside instead of going up the chimney and drove everyone outside. To clear the blockage, one trustee climbed up on the roof and knocked off part of the chimney.

Despite those problems, township and village officials kept using the Town Hall for almost six decades until both the township and the village decided in 1939 to build separate, new structures. By then, ownership of the Town Hall had switched from the township to the village because of a change in Ohio law. As Bonsey explained it in a



This was the Town Hall that Olmsted Township built in 1882 to serve both the township and the Village of Olmsted Falls. The village tore it down in 1939. The Congregational Church stood to the left of it.

March 26, 1982, interview with local historian Bruce Banks, the change gave an incorporated municipality, such as a village, “the right by law to seize any structure that was within their boundaries. Well, it caused a lot of feeling among township people. Of course, I was on the [Village] Council, and at the time, we needed a new fire station.”

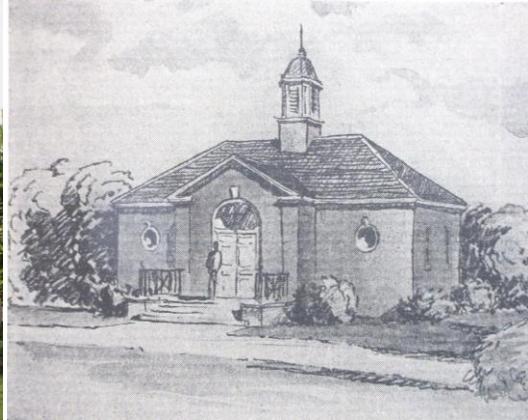


This small jail, built in 1878, was moved in the early 20th century to Mill Street, where it housed the village firetruck until the 1940s, when the new Village Hall was built. Clint Williams expanded it in the 1990s to serve as a store in Grand Pacific Junction.

At the time, the village used a small building along Mill Street behind Simmerer and Sons' Hardware to house its firetruck. That little building was the former two-celled jail, which had been moved a few times since it was built in 1878. (Today, the slightly expanded building is the Olde Jail House at 25546 Mill Street in Grand Pacific Junction. It has housed several businesses over the past few decades with Posh Elements Boutique being the most recent.) The desire for a better fire department facility thus was one factor that motivated Olmsted Falls to replace the old Town Hall.

Having lost ownership of the Town Hall, township trustees decided in 1939 to build a new Township Hall at the corner of Fitch Road and Cook Road. Since then, the township has supplemented that small

building with several more buildings to house its police department, fire department, service department and other parts of township government.



Olmsted Township built a new hall at Cook Road and Fitch Road in 1939 after it lost ownership of the old Town Hall in Olmsted Falls to the village. The photo on the left was taken in 2023. The drawing on the right depicted the Township Hall in the 1939 homecoming program because it was still under construction at that time.

It seems Olmsted Falls temporarily moved the village government into the old Union Schoolhouse on the Village Green between the time the old Town Hall was demolished and the new Village Hall was built. That's because the *Olmsted Falls*

Homecoming 1939 Souvenir Program shows a photo of the old school identified as “Olmsted Falls Village Hall.”

As Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 book on Olmsted history, when the village tore down the former Town Hall, the plan was to replace it with a new building estimated to cost \$18,000. The village was to raise \$5,000 through a one-mill levy and supply all the usable material that could be salvaged from the old building, while the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) would help with the construction and the rest of the financing.

When that plan was made, Bonsey was the president of Village Council with no intention of running for mayor. But as he told Banks in 1982, Mayor George Spaulding came to him after Spaulding decided not to run for re-election.

“Charlie, you got to run for mayor next time,” Spaulding said.

“No, George,” Bonsey said. “I’ve never had any thought of running for higher office than being a councilman.”

“No,” Spaulding said, “You’ve got to save the place.”

Bonsey said, in 1982, that was “because there were other characters around that weren’t too favorable, so I ran for mayor in 1939. I was re-elected twice – three terms. Well, there were a lot of people that were against three-termers. A lot of them were bitter about my running for a third term. But I had an opponent that was very determined that he was going to be the mayor next time. He had a companion that went out campaigning with him, and they were making bets that I couldn’t win. But I won five to one. He was so bitter, his wife said, ‘Well, there are a lot of liars in Olmsted Falls because a lot of people signed his petition, but they didn’t vote for him.’”

Perhaps, when Spaulding told Bonsey he had to “save the place,” he didn’t have the project to build the new Village Hall specifically in mind, but that’s the way it turned out as Bonsey took over as mayor in 1940.

“It was my headache to see that that building was completed,” Bonsey said in 1982. “Well, the government hadn’t put out enough money to build. The walls were up with no roof on, and WPA pulled out. Well, it just happened that I was working for the



The 1939 homecoming program showed this building as the Olmsted Falls Village Hall at the time. It was the former Union Schoolhouse on the Village Green. It seems the village used it for municipal activities during the period after the old Town Hall was torn down and before the new Village Hall (later named the Bonsey Building) was finished.



This postcard from either the 1940s or early 1950s shows the Village Hall not long after it was built.

Carl Watson, who was the Ohio director of the WPA from 1933 to 1945, to get help right away to finish the building.

“The cost of salvaging the old material was far more than anticipated and \$11,000 was added to the cost, making the total cost \$30,000,” Holzworth wrote. “The building was designed to accommodate an ample council room, the police department, jail, and to house the fire department.”

The village held an open house for the public to see the new building on April 13, 1942.

After Olmsted Falls and West View merged in 1971, the newly united village, which soon became a city, had two village halls. They were designated as the North Hall and the South Hall. Officials used the South Hall, the former West View Village Hall in an old school building (now home to Emerald & Violet Studio at 9722 Columbia Road), for holding council meetings.

In November 1983, a bit more than 40 years after the North Hall was built, Olmsted Falls officials decided to honor Bonsey, the mayor who made sure the building was completed, by renaming the North Hall as the Bonsey Building. A resolution passed by the council cited him for donating “his time and experience to friends, groups and residents of Olmsted Falls.” By that time, Bonsey was 90 years old and living in Rocky River.

The *News Sun* reported that Olmsted Falls Kiwanis Club, for which Bonsey was the last surviving founding member, also honored him in January 1984 with a plaque and other items at a special dinner. Bonsey, who was born in 1893, lived until 1987, a few years after the community honored him. His grave is in the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery (Turkeyfoot).

county, and there was another fellow working with me that knew somebody that had some connection with the WPA business. I told him about our Town Hall only being half built. So, he said, ‘Come with me.’ We went up to see this fellow. We needed \$11,000 more than we got.”

As Holzworth wrote, work came to a halt in July 1940 with only the outer walls erected because the WPA was unable to provide enough masons, bricklayers and other skilled laborers. He said Bonsey contacted

According to Holzworth, he was one of five members of the Olmsted Falls High School Class of 1912, but Bonsey said in his interview with Banks that he graduated from high school in 1911. In addition to being a founding member and first secretary of the Olmsted Falls Kiwanis Club when it was organized in 1927, Bonsey served as the first president of the Olmsted Falls Historical Society (not to be confused with the current Historical Society of Olmsted Falls) when it was formed in 1955.



This is the Ohio Historical Marker erected in 2011 in Lakewood to mark the former site of the National Carbon Company, where Charles Bonsey once worked.



This photo courtesy of Mike Gibson shows the Village Hall in its early years. It was taken some time before the mid-1950s, when the Congregational Church next to it was torn down as part of the project to build the current Olmsted Community Church building.

When Bonsey graduated from high school, he replaced his brother, John, as the railroad's assistant station agent at the Olmsted Falls depot, but he stuck with that job for only three years. He had let two brothers, whose last name was Mitchell, know that he wasn't happy working at the depot. Those brothers told their father, who was the traffic manager for the National Carbon Company in Lakewood, although Bonsey referred to it as in Cleveland. The father commuted to work on the train known as the Plug, which ran between Norwalk and Cleveland, so he was at the Olmsted Falls depot twice every day. One morning, Mitchell came up to Bonsey in the presence of the station agent, Charlie Partch.

“I’ve got a job for you,” Mitchell said, as Bonsey recalled in 1982. “You can start anytime you want to.”

Then, Mitchell said to the agent, “You hear that, Partch?”

“Yes, I heard it,” Partch replied. He wanted Bonsey to stay at the depot.

“Eventually, you would get one of the stations and be station agent,” Partch said.

However, Bonsey didn’t want to wait for that, so he went to work for National Carbon, as he recalled, on March 14, 1914, at its office at 117th Street and Madison

Avenue. He stayed there for eight years until the company forced a change on him. Here is how he recalled it in 1982:

Finally, in 1922, Union Carbide took over National Carbon. Union Carbide had ideas that people in Cleveland didn't have. They decided to split up the office in Cleveland and establish branch offices around the country – Chicago, Kansas City, Dallas, Texas, and New York. They didn't care much whether we went or not. They said, "We've got people working for less money than you're getting here." But times were getting bad, you know, in 1922...so I went home, and I talked to my two brothers. In fact, I talked to the whole family. My mother didn't want me to go. She didn't want anybody to leave home. She thought that when my brother went to Hawaii, oh, that broke her heart. She didn't want me to go, but the two brothers said, "Sure, go ahead. You'll get great experience. You're really at the pulse of the nation."

Bonsey didn't remain in New York, but he stayed long enough to meet the woman he would marry. As one of his granddaughters, Anne Brayley, wrote in an email to *Olmsted 200*, "Grandpa Bonsey married Muriel Jean Ellison. Grandma went by Jean, and Grandma Jean was a Canadian nurse, working in New York at the time she met my grandpa. He was the patient, and she was his nurse!"

His hometown lured Bonsey back, and he then worked for many years in Olmsted Falls mostly in the insurance business. He and his wife, who lived from 1900 to 1991, raised a daughter, Margaret, and a son, Roger.

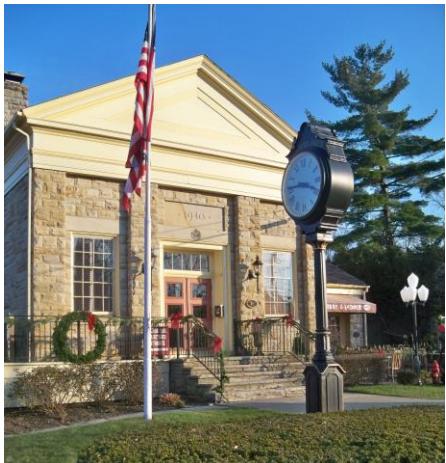


Charles Bonsey carved his name on the side of Inscription Rock in the park in Olmsted Falls.



In this photo from the 1940s or early 1950s, the Olmsted Falls Fire Department shows off its equipment and personnel in front of Village Hall, which was built partly to provide a home for the department.

"Margaret followed in her mom's footsteps and also became a nurse," Brayley wrote. "She met my father, James Lionel Brayley, while he was doing a residency at Case Western Reserve University. My dad went on to become an obstetrician/gynecologist. He married my mom and returned the favour of bringing her back to Canada. They had us four children – David, Allan, Anne and Martha. Three of us still live in and around Toronto, Canada. Allan has been a longtime resident of Denver, Colorado. So, the cross-border sharing has continued for



This photo from December 2018 shows the Bonsey Building as it is now – home to the Moosehead restaurant.

Mapleway Drive in 2001, both former village halls for Olmsted Falls and West View were sold. The late Clint Williams bought the North Hall, or Bonsey Building, and made it part of Grand Pacific Junction. After he renovated it, the Moosehead restaurant moved in with a decorating scheme that pays tribute to the building's former use as a fire station. These days, it's more likely to be called the Moosehead than the Bonsey Building.

Thanks for help with this story go to Bruce Banks, who had the foresight to interview Charles Bonsey five years before Bonsey died and then shared that interview with Olmsted 200. Thanks also go to Kathy Schama, whose grandmother was Bonsey's sister, for putting Olmsted 200 in touch with Bonsey's granddaughter, Anne Brayley, who provided her recollections about Bonsey and his wife, Jean.

Olmsted's Fish Were Huge in the Early Years

Over the decades, many people who have liked fishing have been lured to the west branch of Rocky River in what now is Olmsted Falls. Many who still do that likely would be envious of the fish two men caught more than 30 years before Olmsted Falls became a village and even several years before Olmsted Township took the Olmsted name.

The story comes from a historical account published in the *Berea Enterprise* 85 years ago on November 18, 1938. The headline was: "When the Pioneers Killed a Six-Foot Fish in the River at Olmsted."

The newspaper article told a series of tales from the lives of M.C. Baker and his wife, whose first name wasn't reported. Baker was a very young man when he migrated from Albany County, New York, in 1816. He had intended to settle in Cuyahoga Falls, but when he reached Euclid, he met Captain Calvin Hoadley, "who talked in such

generations!"

Further, Brayley wrote, "We all have fond memories of Grandpa and Grandpa visiting us, and our visits to Olmsted Falls as well. Their home on Brookside Drive was a wonderful place to visit as a child. Grandpa's office was always special and held many smells and artifacts from his work in insurance, and community service that were fascinating to young children!"

But although Charles Bonsey's descendants still remember him fondly, not many people today still refer to the former Olmsted Falls Village Hall he saw finished as the Bonsey Building. After the City of Olmsted Falls moved most of the municipal offices, including the police station, into the former school building at the corner of Bagley Road and

Mapleway Drive in 2001, both former village halls for Olmsted Falls and West View were sold. The late Clint Williams bought the North Hall, or Bonsey Building, and made it part of Grand Pacific Junction. After he renovated it, the Moosehead restaurant moved in with a decorating scheme that pays tribute to the building's former use as a fire station. These days, it's more likely to be called the Moosehead than the Bonsey Building.

glowing terms about a new township named Columbia that Baker was persuaded to give up his original idea of going to Cuyahoga Falls,” as the 1938 *Enterprise* story put it.

Rocky River in Olmsted Falls is still a popular place for people to go fishing. It might become even more popular if they reported anything like the six-foot fish caught by early settlers two centuries ago.



Hoadley was one of the first settlers in Columbia Township when he, his wife and five children arrived in December 1807. Less than two years later, he helped to organize Columbia as a civil township under Ohio law. Although it was the first township in what now is Lorain County to be organized, it then was in Geauga County, which was much bigger than it is now. The township's first election was held on Monday, April 3, 1809, at Hoadley's house with 19 men present to vote. He was elected to be one of the township's first three trustees.

Thus, it's no surprise that Calvin Hoadley was such a good spokesman for Columbia Township when he met M.C. Baker. As the *Enterprise* reported, the move worked out well for Baker: “Before a year had passed Baker had met, proposed to and married the daughter of the man who had induced him to come to Columbia. They lived together for over fifty years, raised a large family of children.” The Bakers, who were married in 1817, lived for several years with the Hoadleys.

Although the *Enterprise* article said M.C. Baker helped to build the dam and mill along Rocky River at the northern edge of Columbia Township, Calvin Hoadley and his brother, Lemuel, built the dam and mill in 1809, five years before Baker first heard about Columbia Township. The base of the dam still can be seen stretching across the river just south of Sprague Road, next to Gibbs Butcher Block.

Sometime, apparently in the early 1820s, Baker and his wife moved to land in what later became Olmsted Township. That's when they saw the big fish, according to the *Enterprise* article:

One day, when they lived in Olmsted, Mrs. Baker was fishing in the river when she saw a giant fish making its way slowly up the river. It was so large that when it passed through the shoals, the spray would fly high in the air. Mrs. Baker called to her husband and Enoch Carter, who were nearby building a dam for a mill, and the man came with clubs and

pounded the fish on the head until it was dead. It was a monster sturgeon measuring over six feet in length.

If such big fish still could be found there, Rocky River in Olmsted Falls no doubt would attract even more anglers than it does today.

That 1938 *Enterprise* article also included an interesting tidbit of information about how James Geer decided in 1815 to move with his family out of Columbia Township to become the first settlers in the township that became Olmsted:

Geer was a queer character who longed for elbow room. When Columbia's population was scarcely over a dozen souls, he decided it was too thickly populated for him and they moved into the wilds of what is now West View, appropriating a piece of land which later was to be owned by Robert Kirk. On the river bottoms there he built a log cabin with the help of his stepson.

(As told in Issue 125 of *Olmsted 200* from October, Geer also was reported to be one of the first persons in the area to participate in the Underground Railroad by escorting an African American man, who had escaped from enslavement in the South, to Cleveland to catch a boat to freedom in Canada.)

School Got Bigger and Better 85 Years Ago

The Olmsted Falls Local School District had a good year 85 years ago. That year, 1938, was when the district added a gymnasium to its sole school building. It also received a federal grant for more renovations.

The original portion of the building was constructed in 1916, when it replaced several small school buildings around Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. It doubled in size one decade later with an addition in 1926. The gymnasium, which now serves as the Olmsted Community Center, was built on the north side of the school 12 years later.



This gymnasium, which now serves as the Olmsted Community Center, was added to the Olmsted Falls Local School District's lone school in 1938, 22 years after the first portion of the school was built and 12 years after an addition doubled the size of the school.

Then, late in 1938, the school district became the recipient of largesse from the Public Works Administration, one of the New Deal agencies created by the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt in response to the Great Depression. On November 11, 1938, the *Berea Enterprise* reported it this way:

Formal approval by the Public Works Administration of a \$9,818 grant to the Olmsted Falls school district was received last Thursday by the village Board of Education, according to Audrey M. Billings, clerk.

The grant will allow the remodeling and repair of the school at a total cost of \$21,818. The program will be carried out without the levying of additional taxes in the district, Billings said.

Immediately after being notified of the PWA action, the Board sought authority of the Ohio State Tax Commission to issue bonds in the sum of \$12,000, which will be retired out of the general operating funds of the school district. Billings said that this action was probably the first program instituted by a school board under the provisions of Amended Substitute House Bill No. 850, passed at the third special session of the present legislature and effective Oct. 19, 1938.

The Board and the architects, the firm of Mellenbrook, Foley & Scott of Berea, visited the new school buildings of the Cuyahoga Hts. school district last Sunday in a search for ideas and suggestions.

In 2023, \$21,818 wouldn't go very far toward renovating a school building, but it was a big deal in the New Deal 85 years ago. However, it's not clear what work was done at the school back then. For more than two decades now, the main portion of the former school has served as Olmsted Falls City Hall, while the gymnasium has been the Olmsted Community Center for much of that time.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more stories about the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, including one about a big raid on a cockfight 85 years ago.

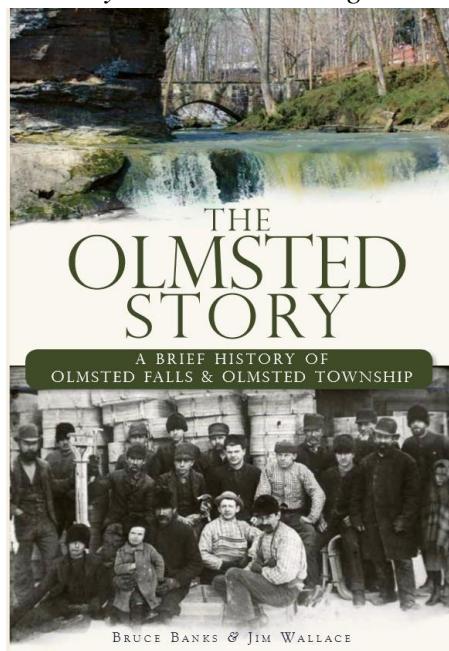
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Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*'s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community's history that you would like to share.

If you have missed any of the past issues of *Olmsted 200* or want to share them with someone else, all of them can be found on Olmsted Township's website. Go to <http://olmstedtownship.org/newsletters/>. A list of *Olmsted 200* issues is on the right side. Click on the number of the issue you want to read. All of the issues of *Olmsted 200* also are available on the website of the City of Olmsted Falls. Find them at: http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/index.php. A link to *Olmsted 200* can be found on the left side of the page.

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for help in proofreading and editing many issues. Thanks also go to David Kennedy for frequently contributing research and insight for some stories. Written contributions and photos, as well as comments and questions about items in this newsletter, will be considered for publication. Send any correspondence by email to: wallacestar@hotmail.com.

Olmsted 200 is written, researched and edited by Jim Wallace, who is solely responsible for its content. He is co-author (with Bruce Banks) of ***The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township***, published in 2010 by The History Press of Charleston, S.C. *The Olmsted Story* is available at the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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