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Vanceboro, Maine, 1870-1900: A Hinterland Community

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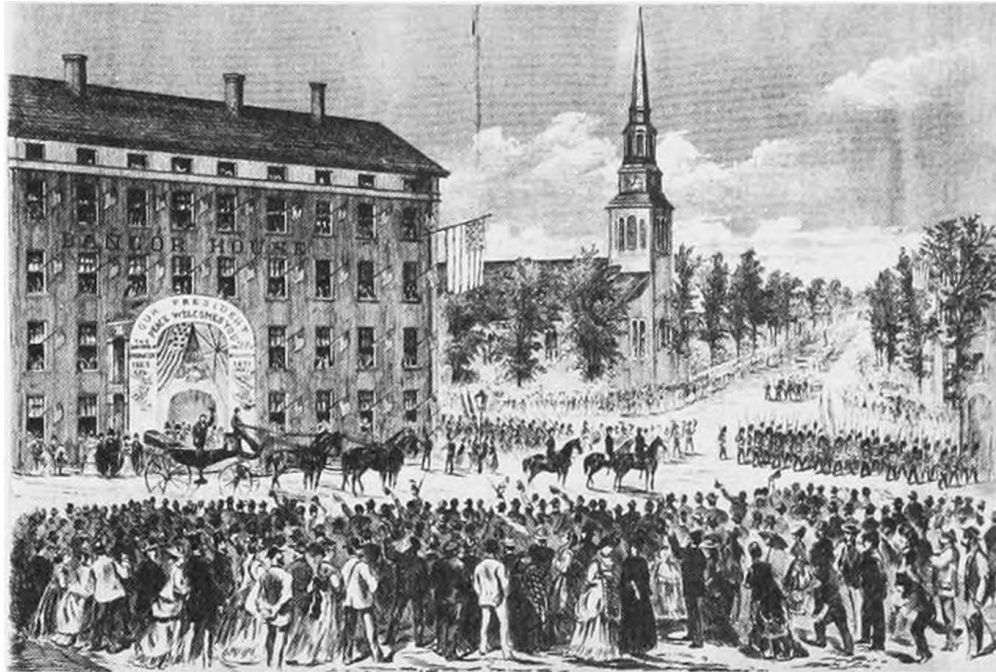
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VANCEBORO, MAINE, 1870-1900:
A HINTERLAND COMMUNITY

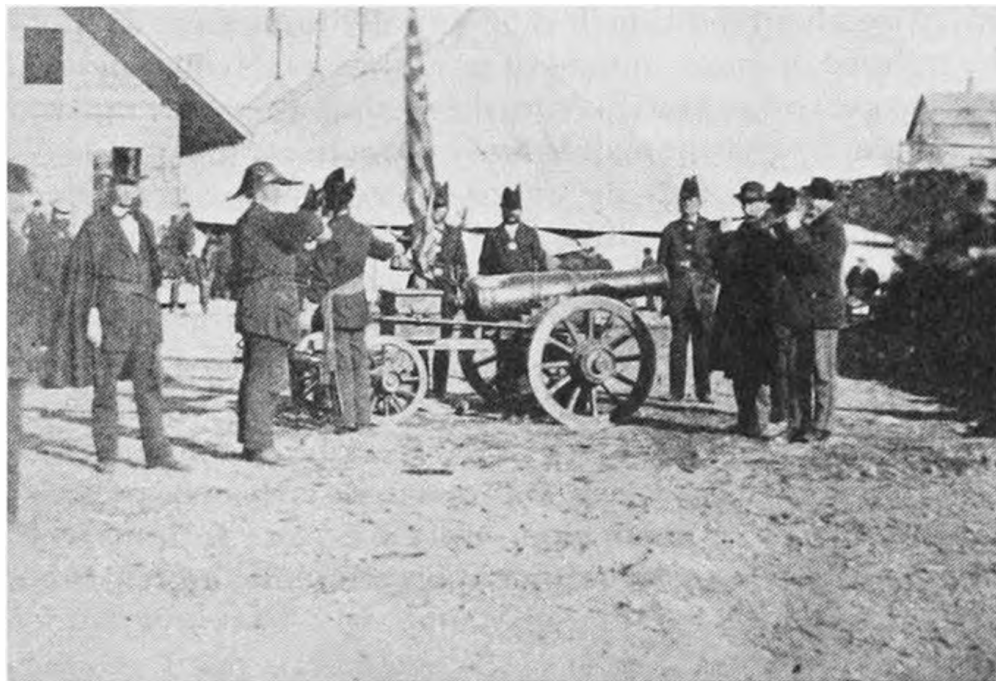
At 1:40 p.m. on October 19, 1871, under sunny skies, a well-decorated Pullman car pulled into Vanceboro, Maine, from Bangor. Arriving to celebrate "Vanceboro's Greatest Day" were President Ulysses Grant, Governor Sidney Perham of Maine, and several other dignitaries. The Saint John, New Brunswick, train pulled in soon after, carrying Canadian Governor General Lord Lisgar and Premier Wilmot of New Brunswick. The occasion marked the completion of the much-promoted European and North American Railway (E&NA). Over the rails an arch had been erected bearing the inscription "Great International Railroad Opening - San Francisco - New York - Bangor - Saint John - Halifax." On the reverse side the archway bore the slogans "The West Salutes the East," and "We fraternize on this Road."

Almost immediately after the arrival of the illustrious passengers, luncheon was served in an immense tent erected for the official ceremony. Provision had been made for seating and serving over twelve hundred persons. G. K. Jewett of Bangor, president of the E&NA, presided over the festivities, with President Grant and Lord Lisgar seated on his right and left respectively. Lord Lisgar, in a closing toast to the U. S. participants, proclaimed:

You have responded to my sentiments based on our common Christianity. I hold every man here pledged to a Christian peace and a Christian brotherhood.



The 1871 woodcut depicts President Ulysses S. Grant leaving Bangor enroute to Vanceboro for the official opening of the European and North American Railway. The new railroad, promoters announced, would bring capital and technology to develop eastern Maine's resources. The large tent in the lower photo enclosed a banquet table at which Grant and other dignitaries were received during the Vanceboro celebration. Illustrations courtesy Bangor Historical Society.



As President Grant and his entourage entered their cars to return to Bangor, one observer recorded, “Never will this part of the Maine - New Brunswick border witness such a day as that of October 19, 1871.”¹

The E&NA, promoted as the “short route to Europe” by Portland entrepreneur John A. Poor, completed the rail link between Portland, Maine, and Saint John, New Brunswick, thereby connecting Vanceboro with the metropolitan cities inscribed so grandly on the archway above the rails.² The entire project, beginning with the 1850 Portland convention organized by Poor to promote his ambitious scheme, had been characterized by “impassioned oratory and untrammelled prophecy.”³ The promoters had assumed the E&NA would serve as “an advance agent of industrialization” for rural communities all along the line in both Maine and New Brunswick, and the expectations generated by this zealous promotional effort fueled the optimism that characterized the Vanceboro festivities on opening day. Indeed, Vanceboro was incorporated in 1874, just three years after the opening of the E&NA in 1871.

But the prophets of industrialism and the grand speeches delivered during the opening ceremonies proved overly optimistic. Vanceboro did benefit economically from the arrival of the railroad, gaining among other things a thriving tannery and a woodworking facility. But the economic upsurge proved shortlived. By 1900 the major gains from access to the “outside” had disappeared, and the railroad’s continuing economic impact on the town was limited to providing jobs for those left unemployed by the closing of the tannery.

The town’s development and decline between 1870 and 1900 reflects the fate of other rural communities linked by railroads in the nineteenth century to larger regional metropolitan centers. Vanceboro’s fate as a “hinterland community” — a rural center whose destiny was tied to distant metropolitan economies — provides an opportunity to explore the impact of these rural-urban relationships upon economic growth and population movement in rural Maine.

Historical geographers have devoted considerable time to understanding such relationships. It seems clear that in the metropolitan/hinterland relationship the metropole is the prime force behind the settlement and subsequent development of surrounding hinterland or satellite communities.⁴ Typically, the metropole effectively dominates the economic growth of the hinterland by supplying investors, management, import and export facilities, and the critical transportation and communication networks. The metropolitan center is also the source of technological developments which greatly influence the hinterland economy.⁵ This impact is particularly strong when the hinterland economy is dependent on a single staple, or extractive, industry, such as lumbering and its offshoots, as was the case in late nineteenth-century Maine.

Vanceboro's hinterland location and metropolitan forces, especially those emanating from Boston, played a critical role in forming the early economic, demographic, and social structure of the town. These forces were reflected in the establishment of F. Shaw & Brothers Boston-based tannery in 1869, the coming of the E&NA in 1871, and the growth of the wooden novelty industry. But these same outside forces were instrumental in the town's decline. The Shaw Brothers tannery failure of 1883 brought a halt to the town's economic progress. The boom and bust economic environment affected demographic movements and family structure in Vanceboro, resulting in a static demographic and economic situation by 1900.

Vanceboro, located in the northeast corner of Washington County, lies on the shore of the St. Croix River, which marks the international boundary between Maine and New Brunswick. William Vance, known as "the Squire" or "Old Vance," originally owned the township that now bears his name. Vance served for several years in the Maine legislature and was a "colorful border figure" who married five times and had many children. He was an "outstanding example" of those frontier settlers who freely traveled and traded back and forth across the international border.⁶

For generations transient logging operations and Indian fishing camps were the only real signs of human activity in the region, but in 1869 Shaw Brothers, an expanding leather tanning firm based in Boston, built a processing plant in the town and began exploiting Vanceboro's abundant supply of hemlock and the waterpower potential of the nearby St. Croix River.⁷ The arrival of the E&NA a few years later did not in itself create employment opportunities in Vanceboro as it did in McAdam, six miles across the border.⁸ The railroad did not employ any workers in Vanceboro until 1880, and then only 9 percent of the total male population (see Table 1).⁹ It was not until 1900 that 22 percent listed their occupation in the census as railroad employee, brakeman, yard master, or car inspector. However, the railroad did provide the all-important transportation link with northeastern metropolitan centers — first Bangor and then Boston — that established Vanceboro as a hinterland economy. Shaw Brothers, able to ship hides to Vanceboro and export the tanned sides of leather to Boston, expanded its downeast operations.¹⁰ Other industries were attracted to Vanceboro's forest resources and its new access to metropolitan centers. The Vanceboro Wooden Ware Company and Hathorn-Foss Company, a box shoo manufacturer, built facilities and began exporting wooden products to international markets via the railroad. The E&NA brought traveling circuses, players, carnivals, and glassblowers to enliven Vanceboro summers beginning in the 1890s.¹¹ The railroad also facilitated cross-border contact with McAdam, Vanceboro's nearest neighbor. In subsequent years the small international community blossomed; hand cars pumped across the border to Vanceboro when the local McAdam grocery store ran short of stock, or returned to Vanceboro with emergency aid when a doctor was needed.¹²

In the years directly following the completion of the E&NA to Vanceboro, the Shaw Brothers tannery provided the major source of employment in the town. The rise and decline of the tanning industry, so important to Vanceboro's economy,



Cutting and hauling hemlock bark, used for processing leather, was a major source of income in rural northeastern Maine in the 1880s. The ample hemlock stands around Vanceboro provided a base for economic growth once the E&NA connected the town to shoe manufacturing centers in the Boston area. Courtesy Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History.

was a critical factor in the economic fate of many small hinterland communities in Maine and the Northeast. Tanning developed into an industry of national prominence in the years between 1860 and 1880 (the latter being the peak year of leather production in the U.S.). Its rise and concentration in large establishments in Maine may be attributed to several factors, the most significant being the abundance and consequent low cost of hemlock tan-bark in Maine and rising leather prices in the post-Civil War period.¹³ The Shaw Brothers — Fayette, Brackley, William, and Thaxter — had learned the tanning business from their father in a small Massachusetts tannery. They eventually owned and operated twenty-four tanneries and seven extract works in Maine, New York, Quebec, and Ontario.¹⁴ The major sole leather operations were located in eastern Maine.

VANCEBORO, MAINE

The production of leather using tannic acid derived from hemlock bark was an offshoot of Maine's central staples industry: lumbering.¹⁵ The tanning industry too possessed several characteristics of staple production. Like other staple items, it was a product processed in the Maine hinterland for the metropolitan Boston market by a Boston-based organization.¹⁶ The industry linked the economic fate of rural Maine towns directly to developments in the metropolis. Moreover, production of the hides expanded with development of the transportation system. Before the E&NA, the hides had traveled by rail from Vanceboro to St. Andrews, New Brunswick, and thence to Boston via steamer.¹⁷ Once the rail link through Bangor was made, hides were imported to Maine from areas as diverse as Argentina, Mexico, India, China, East Indies, and Africa, as well as the southern and western states.¹⁸ The principal market remained near Boston, with a portion being shipped to Europe.

The Boston-based firm's impact on social and economic life in Vanceboro was dramatic.¹⁹ By 1873, just four years after Shaw Brothers began their operation near the river, the Vanceboro tannery employed fifty men, at an average weekly wage of eight dollars, and produced six hundred tons of sole leather.²⁰ This level of production occurred despite a severe economic downturn in the early 1870s and a strike in 1872 that involved between thirty and forty of the company's "best men" — approximately 80 percent of the total workforce at the tannery.²¹

The outcome of the strike was not recorded in the Bangor press, but the fate of the strikers is suggested by the growing power the company exerted over the small town in subsequent years. In addition to supplying a major source of employment, the tannery played an important role in maintaining order. A local newspaper editor, recognizing this new fact of life in 1871, bestowed on the town a new name: Shawville.²² Although Thaxter Shaw lived in Vanceboro only from 1870 to 1883, the brothers succeeded in imposing their social values on the town in other ways. The Shaws were men of "strict temperance principles" and would not "give countenance [sic] to the sale or use of intoxicating liquors on the premises rented or used by



A tannery in Amherst, Maine, suggests a typical metropole-hinterland relationship. Raw materials were processed in rural communities and sent to urban areas for secondary manufacturing. Metropolitan-based firms dictated the fate of isolated and often undiversified local economies. Below, tannery workers sort unprocessed hides according to various grades and weights. Photos from Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History; Rogers, *Practical Tanning* (1922).



them.”²³ This fact is particularly significant because Shaw Brothers had accumulated a total of twenty-nine houses in Vanceboro, as well as a company store, a stable, a public hall, and blacksmith and carpenter shops. In addition, the company owned a tenement house called the “Beehive.”²⁴

The tannery had a decided impact on the local landscape as well. Observations of village life in Grand Lake Stream by local historian Minnie Atkinson illustrate the pervasive influence of the Shaw Brothers’ tanneries established in Vanceboro and elsewhere in the Maine hinterland.

People picked their way along through bark piles and rubbish Some of the refuse, hair and rotten flesh, was used for fertilizer. Carts loaded with it dripped their contents on the roads, and an indescribable stench arose from it Loaded drays of hides were always passing over the roads, merchandise for the store was coming in, teams were busy with lumber, or refuse, or in hauling the bark from piles around the village to the bark mill. Work, smell and confusion were ever present realities.²⁵

Although Thaxter Shaw resided only briefly in Vanceboro, the town’s economy was essentially dictated from Boston, where the firm maintained headquarters and markets. From Boston, the Shaw Brothers orchestrated the importing of hides to be processed in Vanceboro and the exporting and marketing of the finished product. While the eastern Maine tanneries certainly lacked the planned factory organization of the southern New England mill towns, the operation possessed all the essential ingredients of a modern factory system — albeit geographically dispersed. The workers were assembled under the general supervision of an employer who paid wages and furnished buildings, raw materials, and machinery, and who “arranged the production of goods for general market sale.”²⁶

Like the tannery, the wooden novelty business in Vanceboro was controlled by organizations based outside Vanceboro.

The Vanceboro Wooden Ware Company was established in 1879 by Eugene M. Hersey, resident of Bangor, and operated by Thomas Law, a Scotsman born in Russia. In April 1883 a traveler from New York commented on the growing number of clothespin factories “up in Yankee land.” They were, he reported, “big establishments that make nothing else, and they turn out — well, one up at Vanceboro, in Maine, makes them pretty much all year around, I believe, at the rate of about 800 a minute ... [and] sends them ... to every country on the globe where people wash clothes and wear them.”²⁷

By 1885 the “enterprising company” was manufacturing, in addition to clothespins, hardwood flooring, baseball bats, handles of several varieties, cheese boxes, and cant-dog stocks, with markets ranging from Oregon to Australia via the rail connection to Boston.²⁸

In the 1880s the Vanceboro Wooden Ware Company employed an average of twenty men for eleven hours daily at \$1.50 and \$1.00 per day, producing \$12,000 worth of novelties a year.²⁹ The *Maine Mining and Industrial Journal* of 1885 carried notices of the “great success” of the company’s labor-saving butter churn, the expansion of wholesale houses in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania, and news of negotiations to open a western office.³⁰ The Wooden Ware Company demonstrated its prosperity in 1887 by acquiring a large parcel of Vanceboro real estate and designating the land to be sold to those who wished to “build a little house of their own,” in order to deal with the shortage of building lots in the growing town.³¹

Vanceboro’s third major industrial development — again, dependent on outside resources for capital, leadership, and markets — arrived almost simultaneously with the coming of the E&NA. Hathorn-Foss Company, manufacturer of wooden packing boxes, maintained a part-time factory in Vanceboro as early as 1873, employing an average of thirty men by the 1880s for six months of the year.³² In the late 1880s and 1890s, however, production fell off considerably. Hathorn-Foss continued

to maintain sawmills in Lambert Lake, an unorganized township located just west of Vanceboro, and in nearby Danforth, Alton, Blaine, and Oakfield, but markets for its hardwood products had deteriorated. The Dingley Tariff of 1897, which increased duties on imported fruit to protect western and southern fruit growers, accentuated the decline of the region's box-shook industry.³³ At the same time, the entire wood novelty and spool business received another "stunning blow." Purchase of a number of plants by the American Bobbin, Spool and Shuttle Company, a Boston-based syndicate, resulted in the widespread closing of northern New England factories.³⁴

Local companies such as Hathorn-Foss were in no position to compete with interests as politically powerful as the southern fruit growers or with nationally based syndicates like American Bobbin. An excerpt from an 1898 editorial written in Vanceboro concisely reflected the inevitable fate of many hinterland towns: "The modern tendency is to concentrate enterprises of all sorts in great central establishments where conditions are most favorable."³⁵ The railroad that brought such promise to Vanceboro was also capable of transporting raw materials elsewhere to be processed by competing manufacturers much closer to metropolitan markets and sources of capital and labor.

Vanceboro's greatest blow came with the destruction of the Shaw Brothers' empire in the same decades. The tanning firm too was a victim of the tendency toward industrial concentration near urban markets, among other things. The spectacular decline of Shaw Brothers began on August 1, 1883, amidst the gradual business depression of the early 1880s. The firm's failure was due immediately to three factors. First, the major Boston shoe firm of Copeland and Company failed on the same day. Secondly, the Shaws had invested their profits in expansion and consequently lacked working capital. Third, the Shaws had engaged in what their competitors characterized as "uncalled for and unjust" price-cutting, which further deprived the company of working capital.³⁶



Vanceboro in 1881. Colby,
Atlas of Washington County (1881)

The failure of the “most extensive tannery concern in the World,” announced in bold headlines throughout Maine, resulted in immediate attachments on Shaw Brothers property by numerous Maine creditors, the formation of a financial investigative committee, and finally, the creation of “ghost towns” in such villages as Grand Lake Stream, Jackson Brook, and Kingman.³⁷ The creditors eventually received 40 percent of

outstanding accounts through sheriff sales and legal proceedings, while in many communities local governments and private citizens acquired lands and buildings sold for unpaid taxes.³⁸

The decline of the tanning industry in rural Maine was due, however, to broader factors relating to the nature of the industry. Like all staples industries, tanning was severely affected by changes in technology. By 1880 new methods of producing tanning agents had been developed, first with quebrachio extract (from a South American tree rich in tannin), and later with a chemically produced chromium compound. Thereafter, the comparative advantage for leather production industries shifted from hemlock-producing areas like Vanceboro to Boston, with its extensive transportation system and market for leather.³⁹ Secondly, the hemlock supply in Maine had been steadily decreasing, reflecting the unstable nature of an industry dependent upon a finite raw material supply and one based in a hinterland controlled by decisions and forces created in a metropole as distant as Boston.

The failure of the Shaw Brothers enterprises in 1883 had a devastating effect on the Vanceboro economy. By 1900, only 1 percent of the total population in Vanceboro listed "tanner" as their occupation, compared with 27 percent in 1870. (See Table 1.) The decline brought a parallel decrease in both "laborers" and "tradesmen," probably related to the decline in both the tanning and wooden ware industries.

The Vanceboro tannery continued to operate sporadically until 1897 under the supervision of C. W. Clement, a trustee located in Boston. On August 1, 1896, the Shaw tanneries were purchased by International Leather Company. This transaction again illustrates a nationwide trend: combination into large establishments located near hide-producing centers or near the large Boston market.⁴⁰ Despite its critical role in the early history of the town, no evidence remains in Vanceboro today of the Shaw tannery. While local enterprises such as sawmills and the railroad provided subsequent employment opportunities, the economic development of Vanceboro and

VANCEBORO, MAINE

Table 1. Occupation structure of Vanceboro: 1870-1900¹

OCCUPATION	PERCENTS OF EMPLOYED PERSONS LISTED IN CENSUS		
	1870 (N=132)	1880 N(=138)	1900 (N=187)
Artisan*	6	8	11
Clerk	1	2	3
Farmer	5	7	9
Laborer	39	45	21
Merchant/Trader	5	4	3
Professional**	1	3	8
Railroad	0	9	22
Servant (female)	5	14	17
Tanner	27	6	1
Tradesman***	11	3	3

¹SOURCE: U.S. Census 1870, 1880, 1900: Manuscript Census of Vanceboro, Washington County, Maine

*Artisan: baker, carpenter, barber, dressmaker, hoopmaker, boot and shoemaker, painter

**Professional: customs, clergy, physician, sheriff, teacher

***Tradesman: joiner, millman, millwright, piledriver, stonecutter, machinist, teamster

other hinterland communities in Maine was stunted by the inevitable decline of the tanning industry.

The outcome of the Wooden Ware Company story is similar. In June 1885 the company office was moved from Vanceboro to Bangor.⁴¹ Two years later the company applied for a ten-year tax exemption in Vanceboro, which was denied by a twenty-one to six vote. That same year, a large steam mill

manufacturing hardwood lumber burned to the ground in Vanceboro, destroying \$3,000 in new machinery and putting 100 people out of work.⁴² In 1892 Eugene Hersey invested \$100,000 in a wood novelty plant in Enfield, closer to his Bangor headquarters, for which he retained the name Vanceboro Manufacturing Company.⁴³ By 1897 the only remaining evidence of the Vanceboro Wooden Ware Company lay in unpaid taxes on the land, the mill, and two houses owned by Hersey in Vanceboro.

Demographic analysis of the federal manuscript census for the years 1870, 1880, and 1900 reveals patterns of change in the Vanceboro social structure resulting from its hinterland role. Shifts in the importance of tanning, wooden ware manufacture, and the railroad caused dramatic fluctuations in population composition, occupational structure, and population stability. These demographic features supply additional hypotheses regarding the nature of adaptation by local residents to what must have been a frustrating and threatening downward economic spiral over a single generation.

Changes in overall population (age/sex) composition between 1870 and 1900 reflect changes in the economic structure. First, the ratio of males to females dropped precipitiously. While in 1870 there were 148 males to every 100 females, by 1900 there were only 90 males to every 100 females. The changes in sex ratio were due to a decrease in the number of males over time, not an increase of females. Further, the decrease was concentrated among males sixteen to thirty-five years of age. Figure 1 illustrates the changes in age composition among males in percents from 1870 to 1900. One can see a gradual increase in the percentage of males under sixteen and over sixty-five, shown here as "dependents," with a parallel increase in the percentage of males thirty-six to sixty-five. On the other hand the percentage of males sixteen to thirty-six decreased from 49 percent to 28 percent. This change is likely due to two factors. First, there was an out-migration of young single males, as well as young married males, which accompanied the

VANCEBORO, MAINE

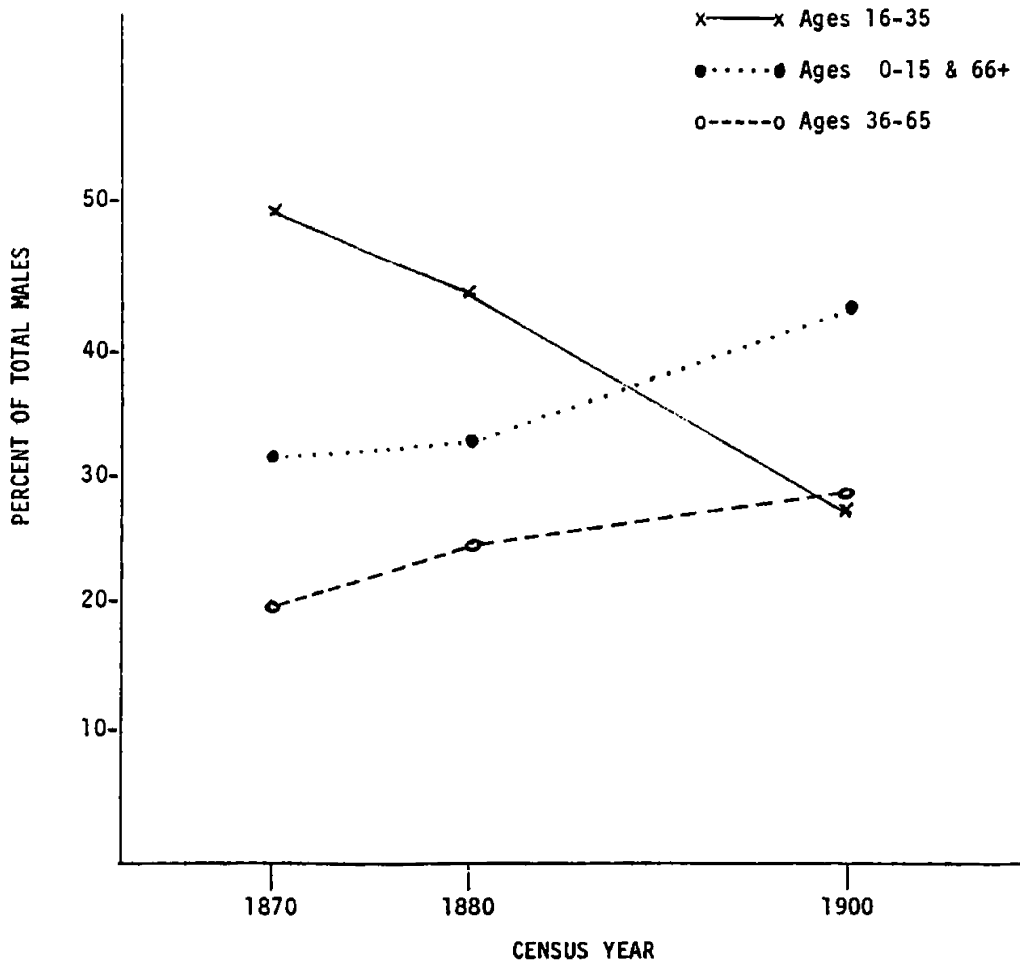


Figure 1. Percent change in male age composition: 1870-1900*

*SOURCE: U.S. Census 1870, 1880, 1900; Manuscript Census of Vanceboro, Washington County, Maine

loss of jobs in the tanning and wooden ware industries. Secondly, those young men who chose to stay in Vanceboro would have aged over time; thus in part the figures are simply due to an aging population.

An examination of residential stability over the thirty-year study period demonstrates that outmigration rather than occupational change was the common solution to economic instability. Census lists, checked for persistence of adult males from

VANCEBORO, MAINE

Table 2. Residential persistence of adult males: 1870-1900¹

YEAR	TOTAL MALES	N (%) PERSISTING 10 YEARS	N (%) PERSISTING 20 YEARS	N (%) PERSISTING 30 YEARS
1870	197			
1880	208	10 (5%)		
1890 ²	435 est.*	53 (25%)	7 (4%)	-
1900	256	48 (11%)	34 (18%)	5 (3%)

*In order to calculate the estimated total of males in 1890, a graph was constructed showing the change in the percent of males in the total population from 1870-1900. The point on the graph corresponding 1890 indicated 50% of the total population would have been male, all other things equal. There were 870 people living in Vanceboro then, hence the male population is estimated: 50% of 870 - 435.

¹SOURCE: U.S. Census 1870, 1880, 1900: Manuscript Census of Vanceboro, Washington County, Maine

²SOURCE: Vanceboro Town Meeting Records, Voting and Militia Lists, 1890.

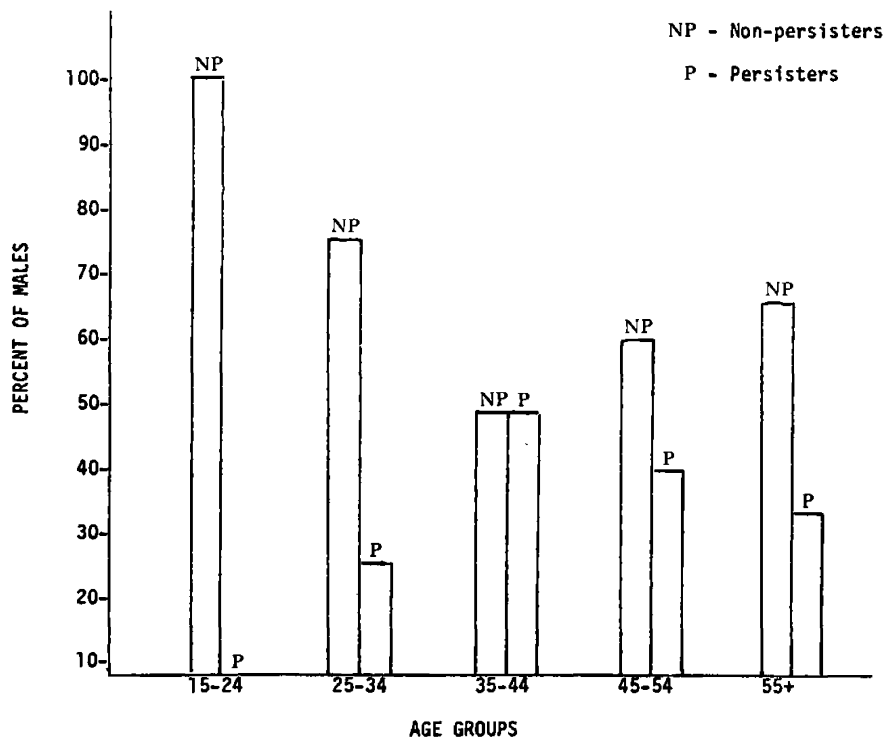


Figure 2. Residential Persistence in males, 1880-1890

one census to the next, indicate the incidence of outmigration or death during the thirty-year period. The peak of residential stability seems to have been in 1880. Table 2 shows that residential persistence from 1870 to 1880 was very low; only 5 percent of adult males listed in 1870 could be found in the 1880 census, and only 3 percent appeared in 1900. On the other hand, 25 percent of adult males listed in 1880 were also listed in 1890, dropping to 18 percent by 1900. Only 11 percent of the estimated 435 present in 1890 stayed until 1900. Overall persistence for the twenty-year period 1870-1890 was only 4 percent, while it was 18 percent for the period 1880-1890.

An examination of the period 1880-1890, during the peak of persistence, shows the association of greater ages and family ties with residential stability. Figure 2 compares the number who persisted with the number who did not in different age groups. Although non-persisters are present in each age group, they constitute the majority of the fifteen to twenty-four and twenty-five to thirty-four groups. Above age thirty-five it evened out. Persisters were significantly more likely to be above thirty-five years of age than below that age ($X^2 = 4.4137$, 1 df, $p < .05$). Those who tended to remain in Vanceboro were also significantly more likely to have family ties than those who migrated ($X^2 = 20.9979$, 1 df, $p < .0001$). Of those thirty-nine men in 1880 who remained in the area for at least ten years, thirty-eight had family ties. Of the eighty-nine who left or died before 1890, only fifty-one had family ties.

Although Vanceboro experienced distinct industrial changes during the study period, occupation was not clearly related to residential stability. Despite the growth of the railroad and the failure of the tannery, men (other than laborers) in both of those industries were almost equally likely to stay or leave. Those who had been tanners and who stayed adapted to the tannery failure by changing occupations. However, upward occupational mobility was rare. Part-time farming, supplemented by other employment (a phenomenon common in Maine hinterland communities), played an important role in

enabling families to remain in Vanceboro. Farming in fact remained a key to population stability in the town. For example in 1900, of the forty-eight household heads who had been there for ten years, fifteen (31 percent) were listed as full or part-time farmers. Of the thirty-seven who had been there twenty years, nine (40 percent) had engaged in farming.

Vanceboro's experience reflects a trend documented in other nineteenth-century community studies: a high rate of working class migration and a low rate of upward occupational mobility.⁴⁴ The decline of Vanceboro's staples industry, a major source of employment in the community, forced a number of local workers and their families to search for work elsewhere. While the data are not conclusive, the number of transient working men with limited occupational mobility appears to substantiate what demographic historians consider a "national phenomenon of major importance."⁴⁵

For those men who did stay in Vanceboro, family and community ties were significant. Leadership roles in Vanceboro were filled by persisters — by established families, including, almost without exception, sons who remained in the town between 1880 and 1900, during the period in which the population became more stable.⁴⁶ Elisha Holbrook, Charles Hunter (a tanner overseer), Horace Kellogg, and Ezra Jameson each operated a general store or mercantile establishment in town. G.M.B. Sprague, "Esq." was a customs officer, while George Ross, an "outstanding citizen" of Vanceboro and of Washington County, served as sheriff, game warden, and postmaster.⁴⁷

Jameson, Holbrook, Sprague, and Kellogg also served consistently as town officials, and they or their sons were often elected to the offices of postmaster, tax collector, and supervisor of schools. The same names appeared on petitions requesting action on matters relating to town development. Holbrook, Sprague, and Kellogg were also active in land acquisition, particularly land sold for unpaid taxes.⁴⁸

For employment, other families who remained in Vanceboro resorted to the railroad, and to part-time farming and



In 1915 the rail line brought Vanceboro into prominence again when German saboteur Werner Horn attempted to disrupt the flow of war supplies from Canada to Britain by blowing up the international railroad bridge across the St. Croix River. Courtesy Faye E. Luppi.

operation of sporting camps to supplement their income.⁴⁹ By 1900 the major source of income in Vanceboro was clearly the railroad, which, after the closing of the tannery, was "consistently the largest employer of the town's work force."⁵⁰

The railroad, in fact, provided Vanceboro's second and final experience with international notoriety. On February 2, 1915, blizzard conditions concealed and finally frustrated a German saboteur's attempts to blow up the international railroad bridge over the St. Croix River. The bridge had been used to transport strategic war supplies from central Canada through Maine to the Maritimes and thence to Great Britain. Due to the extreme cold, the dynamite charges caused minimal damage, disrupting traffic for less than a day. The saboteur, Werner Van Horne, suffered frostbite from his attempts to set the charges and was jailed for destruction of U. S. property.⁵¹

Distant metropolitan forces, far more than the environmental challenges of the frontier on which the town was established, shaped Vanceboro's destiny. In spite of its promising

beginning as the site of one of the largest tanneries in the world, a nationally known supplier of clothespins and wooden ware, and a border-crossing for the illustrious European and North American Railway, the town failed to attract new industries following the decline of the tannery and exodus of the wooden novelty companies. Relocation and concentration of industries such as tanning in metropolitan centers like Boston resulted in a greater gap between the metropole and the hinterland village. While the railroad served as a source of employment for the townspeople, Vanceboro's natural resources and metropolitan transportation connections failed to compensate for its precarious hinterland location.

The pattern of metropolitan dominance continued into the twentieth century, although centers of control shifted. Currently, major pulp and paper companies maintain ownership and control of the area's woodland resources and of the water rights of the Chiputneticook lakes and the St. Croix, a fact that has precluded development for recreational purposes, one of the few long-term economic alternatives for the region. Thus Vanceboro today exists as a quiet hinterland village, a shadow to the town that was, in the flush times of the 1870s, an international crossroads and a world supplier of leather and wooden ware.

NOTES

¹*Bangor Whig and Courier*, October 20, 1871; scrapbook, Teague House, Vanceboro, p. 132. The scrapbook, dating to the town's establishment, provided an observer's handwritten account of the ceremony.

²See John A. Poor, "Plan for Shortening the Time of Passage between New York and London," in *The First International Railway and the Colonization of New England: Life and Writings of John Alfred Poor*, edited by Laura E. Poor (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1892), p. 168. Laura Poor's

filiopious biography of her father is sprinkled with excerpts of John Poor's flamboyant writings penned in an attempt to attract investors. Edward C. Kirkland, *Men, Cities and Transportation: A Study in New England History, 1820-1900*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 206, further notes Poor's efforts to "redeem his native state from economic stagnation and forestall the emigration to Massachusetts and the American West." See also Michael Sheehy, "John Alfred Poor and International Railroads: The Early Years to 1860," M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1974.

³G. R. Stevens, *Canadian National Railways* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1960), p. 62; and Alvin F. Harlow, *Steelways of New England* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1946), p. 321, illustrate the conciliatory spirit of the occasion with the following prophecy by General H.A.S. Dearborn of Roxbury: "The rose of England ... twined freshly in America with the beautiful prairie flower ... and bound with the Lilies of Canada ... to compose a fragrant wreath to crown the statue of Concord in the Temple of Peace." Poor had great difficulty in obtaining financial backing and land grants for the E&NA and died six weeks before its opening in 1871. Financial problems stemmed in part from the dislocations arising out of the Civil War and from Poor's use of a broad gauge to divert traffic away from Boston connections. See Robert H. Babcock, "Economic Development in Portland (Me.) and Saint John (N.B.) During the Age of Iron and Steam, 1850-1914," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 9 (Spring 1979): 13. Footnotes for this exhaustively researched article provide an overview of the literature relative to John A. Poor and the E&NA. Elda Gallison, "The Short Route to Europe: History of the European and North American Railroad," M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1950, details the legislative difficulties encountered by the road, but Gallison's work is poorly integrated and lacks analysis. See also George R. Taylor and Irene D. Neu, *The American Railroad Network, 1861-1890* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 28; Edward F. Chase, *Maine Railroads: A History of the Development of the Maine Railroad System* (Portland: Southworth Press, 1926), p. 81.

⁴J.M.S. Careless, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 35 (1954): 1-21; and "Aspects of Metropolitanism in Atlantic Canada," in *Regionalism in the Canadian Community, 1867-1967*, edited by Mason Wade (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 117-29; N.S.B. Grass, *An Introduction to Economic History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1922). Donald Creighton, noted Canadian historian, also explored the concept of metropolitanism in the 1930s, focusing on the St. Lawrence region of Canada as the dominant center in Canadian economic growth. See *Commercial Empire on the Saint Lawrence, 1760-1850* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1937); and *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1944). In *The Fur Trade of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Library, 1927); and *Problems of Staples Production in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1933), Harold Innis

VANCEBORO, MAINE

concurrently expanded the Laurentian view of economic growth with compelling studies of staples industries — fish, fur, and lumber — organized from large metropolitan centers.

⁵Careless, "Aspects of Metropolitansim," p. 118.

⁶See Ava Chadbourne, *Maine Place Names and the People of Its Towns* (Portland: Bond Wheelwright, 1955), pp. 208-09; Harold Davis, *An International Community on the St. Croix, 1604-1930* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1950), pp. 71-73; David C. Smith, *A History of Lumbering in Maine, 1861-1960* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1972), pp. 214-18. Philip Hennessey, in "Town Government: A Survey of Its Successes, Selected Problems, and Future in Vanceboro, Maine," M.A. thesis, George Washington University, 1962, has written the only extensive work on the town of Vanceboro. While Hennessey focuses on town government, his numerous personal interviews with townspeople provide historical background for the town's economic difficulties. The authors of this paper also used data from the Seventh, Eighth, and Tenth manuscript census of Washington County.

⁷Scrapbook, Teague House, p. 132. By 1871 the village had grown to include thirty-six frame houses, fifteen log dwellings, two hotels, two stores, a school house, and a public hall.

⁸William Redstone, et al., *The History of McAdam (1871-1977)* (Fredericton, New Brunswick: Centennial Print and Litho, 1979), p. 165. This is one of the few local histories treating the upper St. Croix region.

⁹The manuscript census data listing occupations from this period, however, do not indicate the meaning of the classification "laborer," used for 39 percent of the male population in 1870. Occupations such as teamster, millwright, carpenter, tanner, and factory worker were listed, and railroad employees were enumerated separately in the 1880 and 1900 censuses. Although the evidence seems to indicate otherwise, railroad workers may have been included in the broad "laborer" category in 1870.

¹⁰*Eastport Sentinel*, November 9, 1881.

¹¹Scrapbook, Teague House; interview with Estelle Susee Philbrook, Vanceboro, Maine, October 26, 1980. The scrapbook contained an 1893 "Grand Ball program," as well as a program for the drama, "Nevada or the Lost Mine," presented in 1889.

¹²Redstone, et al., *History of McAdam*, p. 18. There is little evidence to suggest an "international community" between Vanceboro and McAdam, such as that documented by Harold Davis on the lower St. Croix. Such a relation may have existed between Vanceboro and the small village of St. Croix, located directly across the international river, where Shaw Brothers operated another store and shoe shop (see Vanceboro map), and where several employees of the Hersey-Law clothespin factory boarded.

¹³George A. Riley, "A History of Tanning in the State of Maine," M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1935, p. 99. Riley also notes the northern and

western movement of the tanneries after the shipbuilding business 'had depleted the hemlock supply in Massachusetts.

¹⁴*Eastport Sentinel*, November 9, 1881.

¹⁵See Smith, *History of Lumbering*, pp. 214-17, for a general treatment of the tanning industry as an offshoot of lumbering; and Davis, *International Community*, for a discussion of lumbering on the St. Croix River. The St. Croix Log Driving Company, established in Calais in 1847, provided sporadic employment for Vanceboro residents.

¹⁶*Bangor Whig and Courier*, October 20, 1871.

¹⁷*Eastport Sentinel*, November 22, 1871.

¹⁸*Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics for the State of Maine* (Augusta: Burleigh and Flynt, 1897), p. 59 (hereinafter cited as *BILS*).

¹⁹Scrapbook, Teague House, p. 132.

²⁰*BILS*, 1873, p. 238.

²¹*Eastport Sentinel*, October 9, 1872. In an October 6, 1875, editorial, the *Calais Advertiser* urged businessmen to diversify their interests to stem the heavy outmigration of skilled workers from the area.

²²*Eastport Sentinel*, November 22, 1871.

²³*Ibid.*, April 3, 1872. Quote excerpted from a report written following a visit to the Grand Lake Stream tannery.

²⁴Vanceboro Town Meeting Records, 1896, p. 287, uncollected taxes on nonresident property. Philbrook, interview, recalled the Shaw Beehive and the so-called Shaw Mansion, which still stands in Vanceboro.

²⁵Minnie Atkinson, *Hinckley Township or Grand Lake Stream Plantation* (Newburyport, Massachusetts: Newburyport Herald Press, 1920), pp. 49-50.

²⁶George R. Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1951), p. 229.

²⁷*Maine Mining and Industrial Journal*, April 6, 1883, excerpt from a *New York Sun* article.

²⁸*Ibid.*, February 13, 1885.

²⁹*Eighth U. S. Census, 1880, Manufacturers* (page illegible).

³⁰*Maine Mining and Industrial Journal*, January 16, May 15, June 19, June 26, July 24, August 28, September 11, October 30, and November 27, 1885.

³¹*Calais Advertiser*, November 16, 1887.

³²*BILS*, 1873, p. xxi; *Maine Business Directory*, 1871 (Boston: Briggs and Company, 1871), p. 189. Paul Hathorn and C. R. Foss are listed as a Bangor area lumber dealer and wood turner, respectively. Further Bangor operations include the Hathorn Fancy Forging Company, which manufactured equipment for the Hathorn-Foss Mill of Danforth, Maine. George S. Bachelder, "Hathorn-Foss Mill of Danforth," thesis, Maine State College, 1888.

VANCEBORO, MAINE

³³*BILS*, 1897, p. 37; *Maine State Directory and Gazetteer, 1895* (Methuen: Massachusetts Union Publishing Company, 1895), pp. 333, 337.

³⁴*BILS*, 1897, p. 37.

³⁵*Eastport Sentinel*, March 23, 1898.

³⁶*Bangor Commercial*, August 1-16, 1883.

³⁷Riley, *History of Tanning*, p. 75. The far-reaching consequences of the failure are poignantly reflected by Riley's description of Kingman, incorporated one year before Vanceboro and forced to unorganized township status in 1935. At Grand Lake Stream, Boston interests remained in control even after the failure; over 220 tons of machinery were hauled over the ice and shipped to Boston junk dealers. Atkinson, *Hinckley Township*, p. 58.

³⁸Vanceboro Legal Transactions, Town Records, 1895-1905.

³⁹Riley, *History of Tanning*, pp. 101-03.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Maine Mining and Industrial Journal*, June 19, 1885.

⁴²*Calais Advertiser*, February 2, 1887.

⁴³*BILS*, 1897, p. 37.

⁴⁴See Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). In his study of social mobility in Newburyport, Massachusetts, Thernstrom discovered a highly unstable working class marked by a large number of transient unskilled workers and a very low incidence of upward occupational mobility (pp. 112-14). See also David Gagan, "Geographical and Social Mobility in Nineteenth Century Ontario: A Microstudy," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 13 (1976). Gagan observed high levels of mobility as a chronic and permanent feature of nineteenth-century life in North America, caused by inequalities in a limited social environment.

⁴⁵Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*, p. 179.

⁴⁶See Robert Mitchell, "A Community in Transition: Brooksville, Maine, 1850-1870," M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1976. Mitchell discovered a similar pattern of a few dominant families persisting in the community. Following the decline of the shipping industry, Mitchell found that key families, who were able to keep their own children within the community and diversify into activities other than shipbuilding, established a social hierarchy in the town (pp. 61-64). However, he concluded that the decision to stay in Brooksville committed the persisting families to a social system unable to meet the changing nature of American society (p. 1).

⁴⁷*Calais Advertiser*, October 10, 1888; September 13, 1933 (obit.).

⁴⁸Town Transactions, 1895-1905; Town Meeting Records, list of unpaid taxes and pertinent transactions.

⁴⁹See Davis, *International Community*, p. 265, for a discussion of the importance of sporting camps and resorts in saving the upriver St. Croix communities "from extinction." In Vanceboro, the Fayette Crandlemire

family operated a fishing camp for over twenty years, supplementing income from railroad employment and earning income to finance college education for the two sons and three daughters in the family. "Sports" came from as far away as Washington, D.C., Tennessee, and Kentucky. Letter from Mary Crandlemire Welner, March 2, 1981. Coauthor Faye Luppi spends summer vacations at the still-standing family camp on the shore of Spednic Lake.

⁵⁰Reginald Crandlemire, town selectman, quoted in Hennessey, "Town Government," p. 48.

⁵¹*Saint John Globe*, February 2, 1915; interview with Aubine Crandlemire Abbott, Vanceboro, Maine, August 3, 1980. For a detailed account and photographs of the bridge incident, see French Strother, "Fighting Germany's Spies," in *The World's Work: A History of Our Time* (New York: Arthur W. Page, 1918), pp. 652-53; and Elizabeth Armstrong Low, "The Bridge Over the River St. Croix," *Down East* 20 (March 1974): 66-67.

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