



The Developing Patterns of Main Library Organization

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ALTHOUGH there are no two public libraries totally alike in organizational structure, today there is a universal acceptance in all major main public libraries of subject departmentalization as a device for effectively bringing the patron and the material together. The development of departmentalization in public libraries into three major activities divisions—public services, technical services and administrative services—came early in American library history. The account of the development of departments by function (circulation and reference), by clientele age (adult and children), by type of work (acquisitions and cataloging), and by administrative need (business office and building maintenance) have been thoroughly covered by Metcalf¹ and the McDiarmids,² and recently reviewed by Overington.³

In the evolution of the organizational structure that is the accepted norm today in large main libraries, many names famous in the logs of library history appear—Poole, Putnam, Foster, Brett, Vitz, Perry, Wheeler. They all made their contribution but Wheeler's experiment at the Enoch Pratt Free Library had the most lasting and significant effect on library organization. The Enoch Pratt Free Library, completed in 1933, was the culmination of the gradual evolution of departmentalization in libraries which began at Cleveland in 1925 and continued at Los Angeles in 1926.

Because the public library is a practical and viable institution, the classic organization perfected by Wheeler in 1933 has been changed and is today changing further in response to new developments in society. New media such as audiovisual material, which are becoming an increasingly important segment of the resources of the library, were unknown in the library in the early 1930s. Effective management and economic strain have caused libraries to reexamine the relationship and

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the number of departments within the library. The development of regional responsibilities and the growing use of the library as an information center have had lasting effects on libraries and indicated new patterns for organizational structures. Making changes in its structure, its type of service and its collections are essential if the public library is to continue its central role within the community.

Currently most large urban libraries segregate audiovisual materials into a separate department by form. A part of the basic concept of subject departmentalization groups all materials relating to a given discipline together to assure the widest possible information resource. Barton feels that this approach, assembling all materials at one place, enables the researcher and staff specialists to offer flexibility in inquiry response.⁴

Films and recordings are most frequently separated as a distinct unit from subject departments because (1) it is easier to shelve and store such specialized materials in concentrated areas; (2) it is easier to have a qualified staff to make repairs to film and check for scratches and other damage to recordings; (3) films are usually for group use and these groups are better served by a staff knowledgeable in this type of material; and (4) film selection is a great deal more involved than selection of printed materials because of the specialized technology involved such as adequate sound, filming techniques, and editing, in addition to adequate subject matter coverage.

Recordings are more and more finding their way into the subject departments, especially in the fine arts areas. With the advent of the tape cassette there is little maintenance, and the subject department staffs can easily handle the care involved. Unlike films, recordings are used both in the library and in the home for use by individuals, just as printed materials are.

Microforms whether fiche, print, card or film are a growing resource for all libraries and are handled differently in practically all libraries. The older established libraries have treated microforms as a storage method and house them in a separate unit. Overington says the care and servicing of the material and the accompanying equipment is simply a technical operation and has no place in the subject department.⁵ Using this philosophy, most of the very large libraries do have separate microform sections or departments. In spite of this logical determination, the Houston Public Library in its reorganization program plans for a new main building is planning to have microforms separated into the various subject departments with other types of materials of like

subject. It is true materials must be retrieved by the subject specialist in either case; however, having them more readily available will hopefully encourage their wider use.

As printed matter and as an important segment of the current material available on all subjects, periodicals are generally filed in the department in whose subject field they fall. The wisdom of this practice is obvious because of the extension value which periodicals offer to the book collection. The reader can work in one area with all material. (Microforms somehow escaped this piece of logical thought.)

Actual practice has shown that the heaviest demand for periodicals is from both high school and college students. Term papers and debate topics frequently have such currency that periodical literature is the prime source which is not restricted to any one subject department discipline. To cope with this problem, some libraries have changed their policy of scattering periodicals to various departments and have created special open shelf periodical collections of the most used titles such as those found in *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*. Queens Borough Public Library, Enoch Pratt Free Library and Memphis Public Library and Information Center have successfully followed this plan which has greatly relieved their staffs from this very routine service.

Documents are handled in a widely divergent manner in the several large urban libraries of the country. Many libraries feel that because of the wealth of information available in document form, content should be emphasized instead of publisher. Many other libraries, however, fashion the collection as a separate entity or section of one subject department in which their current and popular usefulness is frequently lost or forgotten. Dallas, Denver and Louisville have had great success, however, using this technique with increasingly wider use of the material by the public. Certainly a very strong and persuasive staff is essential.

From Wheeler's classic assortment of subject departments there has been an increasing trend toward fewer and larger departments. There are several cogent reasons for this development: (1) the library user is greatly benefited by a simpler structure; (2) with the classification system presently in use, subjects are not normally brought together in many small departments as with a consolidated scheme; (3) there are naturally fewer problems with book selection overlap; (4) the larger number of departments require a larger staff and consequently a heavy drain on the budget; (5) with fewer departments, duplication of general reference tools is not as necessary (although some libraries at-

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tempt to hold duplications to a minimum, others consider subject departments as special libraries and attempt to round out the collections by heavy duplications); and (6) fewer departments indicate a possibility of fewer departmental catalogs.

Gwynn has strongly stated that subject departmentalization has created a complex organization which in fact acts as a barrier for the patron in the use of the library.⁶ Having a larger number of public service desks confuses and bewilders the novice library patron in finding his way in a very large library. Difficulties of control and coordination often occur with a plethora of departments. In spite of these criticisms, large libraries have universally taken the subject department path. Gscheidle pointed out that departmental organization is a device used by administration in order to cope with size.⁷ It actually becomes a necessity for the large library with a book collection too large to be serviced from one area. The complexity and higher cost are products of the large library rather than the system.

Demonstration of the change or progression of groupings for departments is easily shown by examining the Enoch Pratt Free Library's organizational structure through the years. In 1933 the library had six subject departments; the 1965 reorganization plan combined these into three. Further restructuring is presently being evaluated and studied. A recent staff study considered the situation under the reorganized plan which had functions in general reference, telephone reference and the public information center unrelated, and suggested changes to smooth the relationships between functions.⁸

Table 1 shows that although there is no absolute agreement as to subject departmentalization, there are areas where similarity does exist and where different approaches are practiced. There seems to be consensus that structure roughly would combine science and technology, art and music, literature and language, history and biography, philosophy and religion, and sociology and education. With the trend for larger units, the indication seems to be to bring science and technology and business and economics together.

There is a wide variance in what constitutes the collection for the popular library. Subject departments are geared to offer the best service to the specialist and serve the specific need. To serve the patron with a general need, the popular library, frequently referred to as a branch library within a large specialized library, was created. In some libraries, such as Dallas, the department actually houses the fiction collection alone. Pratt has a fiction and popular reading department.

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TABLE I

SUBJECT DEPARTMENTALIZATION IN SELECTED LARGE PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN 1971

Libraries	Subject Departments
Brooklyn Public Library	Language and Literature History, Travel, Biography Social Science Science and Industry Art and Music Fiction
Dallas Public Library	Literature and History (includes biography) Science and Industry (includes business) Community Living (sociology, law, philosophy, religion, recreation and sports) Fine Arts General Reference Popular Library (actually fiction) Texas, Local History and Genealogy
Enoch Pratt Free Library	General Reference Popular Library Social Science, History and Education Business, Science and Technology Fine Arts Humanities Maryland
Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County	History Literature Education and Religion Government, Law and Business Science and Industry Fine Arts
Public Library of the District of Columbia	Art Black Studies Music Biography Business and Economics Fiction Foreign Languages Literature Philosophy, Psychology and Religion Sociology and Education Technology and Science

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TABLE I (continued)

Libraries	Subject Departments
	Washingtonia Popular Library
Queens Borough Public Library	Art and Music Business, Science and Technology Social Science Language and Literature History, Biography and Travel Long Island Popular Library
Seattle Public Library	Literature, Language, Philosophy and Religion History, Biography and Government Education Business and Economics Science and Technology Art and Music
San Francisco Public Library	Art and Music History and Social Sciences Literature, Philosophy and Religion Periodicals Science and Technology Popular Library

Sources: Information is assembled from replies to inquiries made by the author to the libraries listed.

Other libraries have experimented by including a teen-age collection. Some libraries which had not used the popular library have now created one in response to a definite public need. San Francisco recently established a popular library stocked principally with paperbacks. Generally the popular library is conceived of as a small browsing collection with emphasis on recreational reading and currency. But in those very large libraries which treat subject departments as informational centers handling all the specific needs of the library, the popular library is much larger and more encompassing, handling, as was stated earlier, all the general needs of the library. The Free Library of Philadelphia is planning to provide a popular library with approximately 30,000 to 40,000 volumes, including a general reference collection at the undergraduate level.⁹ The Boston Public Library is presently building a very

large addition which will house principally their general library which will offer circulating materials for the general reader. The collection will be extensive and will complement the great reference collections which will serve the scholar and the researcher. The relationship between the reference, general library and branches of the Boston Public Library is shown in Fig. 1.

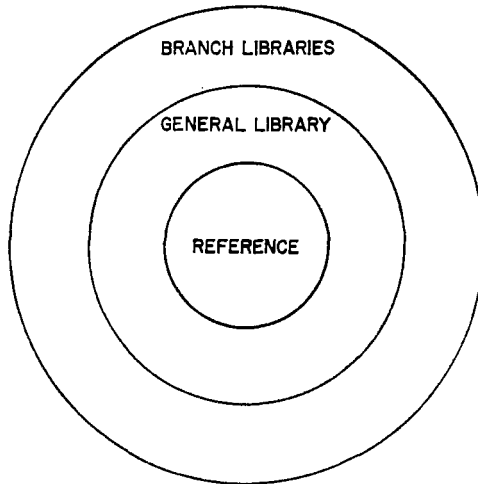


Fig. 1. Boston Public Library Relationships

A current trend for resource responsibilities for major urban libraries beyond the city proper is offering whole new dimensions and with these the need for organizational readjustment. The large city library collections offer a reservoir of specialized materials which give strength to the new library networks developing in many parts of the country. Interlibrary loan sections are an important aspect of this direct service, as are consultation services. To assist in coordinating these services, some have a coordinator to supervise this operation and its relations with the cooperating libraries.

The extensive growth of main library telephone reference service has caused a heavy burden upon the staffs of the subject departments.¹⁰ This is very expensive use of professional time for rather routine and simple reference service. To avoid this, libraries are increasingly following the practice of setting up telephone reference services. This service is frequently staffed by college graduates and siphons off simple repetitive questions leaving the serious in-depth research questions to

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be answered by the professional subject librarians. Those queries which are not easily answered and require specialized attention are passed on to the subject specialist professionals in the subject departments. This technique is one method which is used in an attempt to give better service. With the rapid growth of telephone inquiries in recent years, it has been a difficult task to decide which deserves better service, the telephone patron or the in-person patron.

The idea of the public library as a public information center is not new, but it is new to treat it as a specialized and formal project. Current thinking is based on the assumption that the traditional information services of the public library are not sufficient and the library should in addition serve as the clearinghouse of information for its whole community. The Memphis Public Library has added "and Information Center" to its name to reflect this new idea.

A thorough study and feasibility report on the subject of the library as an information center was made by the University of Maryland School of Library and Information Services for the Enoch Pratt Free Library.¹¹ As a result of the study, a public information center has been established as a part of Pratt's main library. Experience has shown that this function is related to others, and in Pratt's proposed organizational structure it will be a part of the informational services department.

There is currently a great deal of concern with service to children in main buildings in large cities. Emphasis in main libraries is shifting to serious, scholarly and in-depth research. Most libraries have realized that each year fewer children are visiting the main library except on tours and school visits, and some libraries are planning organizational changes to compensate for these shifts in use. Pratt is planning a small book collection for children in the fiction and popular reading department.⁸ The St. Louis Public Library curtailed its services at the main building for children and young adults because demand was down and opened a new children's literature room in the main library for service to scholars, writers and artists interested in the field of children's literature, and for the few children interested in browsing.¹² In Dallas the young adult department has been discontinued as a separate department and the collections have been integrated in the adult and young people's collections. The former children's department has been designated as the youth department.¹³

Every library, no matter how small, needs an administrative organizational framework to assure direction. In large libraries the organizational structure is usually rather conventional with several executives

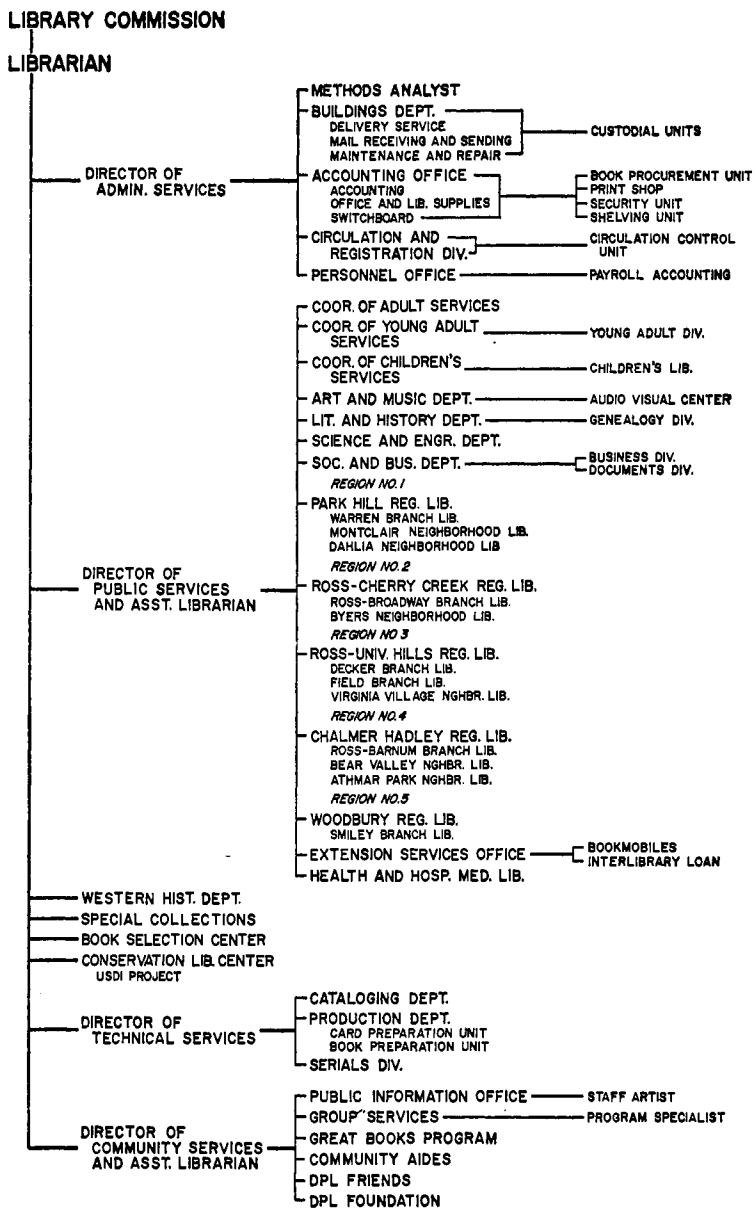
sharing the administrative function. Beyond the director and assistant director positions, the most commonly used titles are coordinators of adult and children's services. Coordination is a tremendous problem with subject departmentalization because of the increased supervision span which is inherent in this organizational arrangement. One method which is used to cope with this problem and which is in common use today is to assign to one person the responsibility for the whole main library public service operation. Some libraries have this responsibility assigned to the assistant director. This can be a great burden if the assistant director is in addition the deputy director of a library system. A number of libraries have an additional position, sometimes designated chief of the main library, to supervise directly the main public departments.

In Denver four subject departments relating to general service to adults report to the director of public service while four special departments report directly to the city librarian. Coordinators of children's work and young adult work supervise the departments for the two age groups.¹⁴

The Dallas Public Library in reorganizing in 1968 divided the position of assistant director into the two positions of associate director for public services and associate director for management services. Supervision of the main library and the branches were under the new associate director for public service and technical services, while business and maintenance management operations were under the director for administrative services. This plan logically divides the responsibilities and creates fewer complex relationships and dual areas of responsibility. The adult coordinator and the youth coordinator, in the new scheme, have been relieved of their duties to readers and are able to concentrate on their book-providing responsibilities. The responsibility to readers service has been placed with the chief of the main library. The arrangement resulted in better coordination since the branch chief is a line officer with direct supervisory responsibility while the coordinators are staff officers.¹⁵

/ The concept of public library departmentalization has been effectively tried in a number of variations through the years and has been accepted as the best way to handle large volumes of material and growing requests in greater depth in a better way. The main library is not, as many seem to mistakenly consider it, a large branch library. It is the chief center for information resources within a community or a region with services principally for the specialist/

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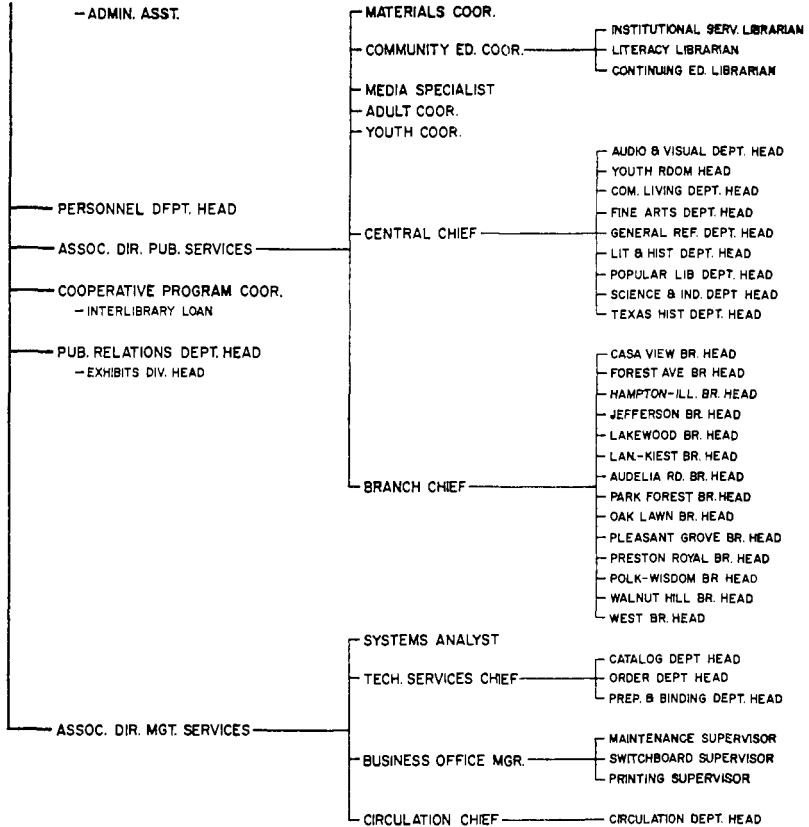
DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY, DENVER, COLORADO

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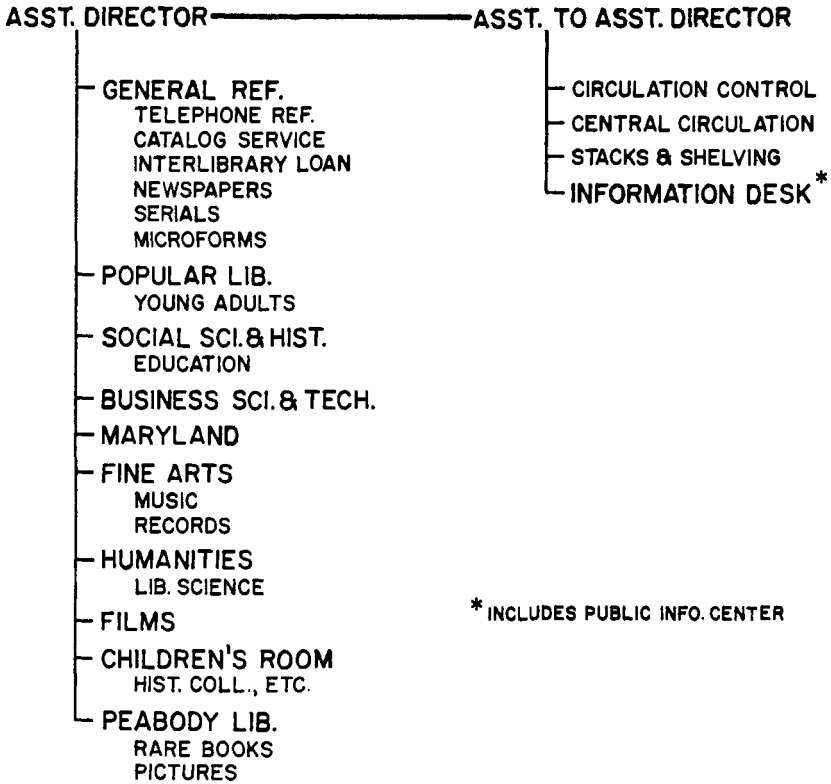
DIR. OF LIBRARIES

- ADMIN. ASST.



DALLAS PUBLIC LIBRARY, DALLAS, TEXAS

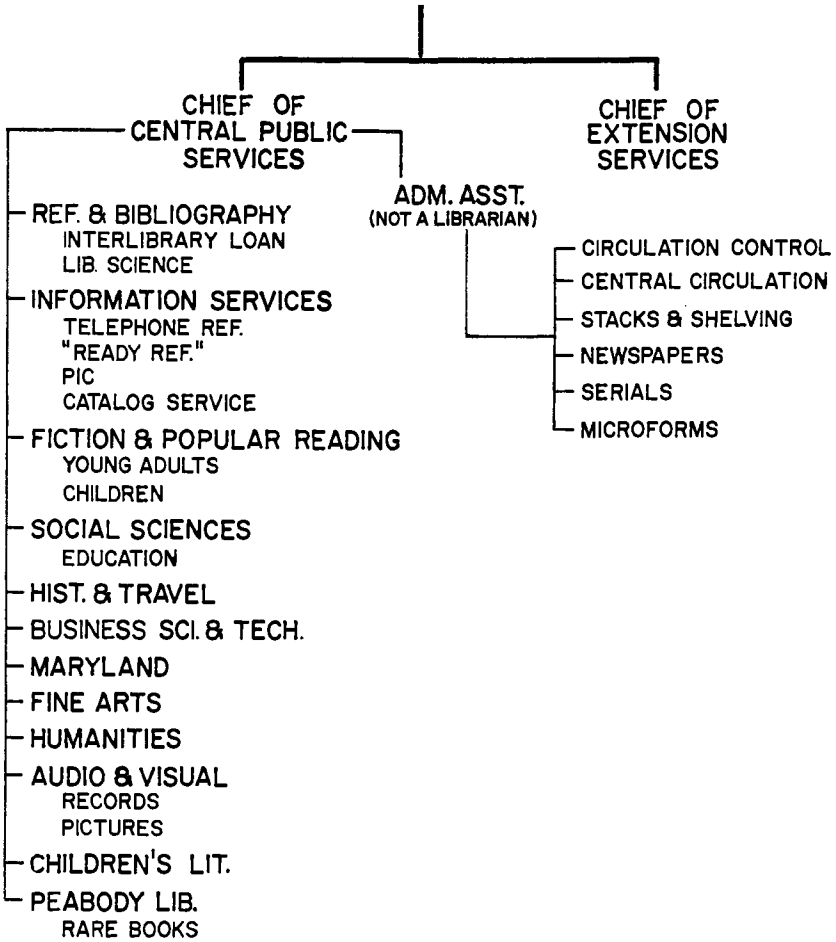
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PROPOSED PLAN

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Through the years library organizational structures have become simpler and have moved more in response to the patron's needs (see Figs. 2-5) than the original and classical structure first presented in the 1920s and early 1930s. It has proven that flexibility is its strength with main public libraries better structured today to meet the needs of the community. Undoubtedly continual change through experimentation will keep this unique institution alive and a vital part of community life.

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