



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# VAN NEST THE BRONX





The Historic Districts Council is New York's citywide advocate for historic buildings and neighborhoods. The Six to Celebrate program annually identifies six neighborhoods that merit preservation as priorities for HDC's advocacy and consultation over a yearlong period.

The six, chosen from applications submitted by community organizations, are selected on the basis of the architectural and historic merit of the area, the level of threat to the neighborhood, the strength and willingness of the local advocates, and the potential for HDC's preservation support to be meaningful. HDC works with these neighborhood partners to set and reach preservation goals through strategic planning, advocacy, outreach, programs and publicity.

The core belief of the Historic Districts Council is that preservation and enhancement of New York City's historic resources—its neighborhoods, buildings, parks and public spaces—are central to the continued success of the city. The Historic Districts Council works to ensure the preservation of these resources and uphold the New York City Landmarks Law and to further the preservation ethic. This mission is accomplished through ongoing programs of assistance to more than 500 community and neighborhood groups and through public-policy initiatives, publications, educational outreach and sponsorship of community events.



**Council on  
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## VAN NEST

Located in the eastern part of the Bronx, the Van Nest neighborhood takes its name from the Railroad station that served this area in the late 19th century. Then director of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad, Abraham Reynier Van Nest, named it after his father Reynier, who was a descendant of Dutch settler Pieter Pietersen Van Nest.

Before 1870, the region was part of Westchester County and land was mainly used for farming. The opening of the Morris Park Racetrack in 1889 and the continuous expansion of the public transportation system prompted residential development. The Van Nest Land & Improvement Company surveyed and divided the land surrounding the racetrack into lots for development in 1892, selecting the name “Van Nest Park” as a nod to the adjacent Morris Park and the well-known rail station. A street grid was implemented in 1895, but a few streets maintained their original layout. Such is the case at the intersection of Van Nest Avenue, Unionport Road, and Victor Street, currently the location of Van Nest Park **(Site 6)**.

Single-family houses were among the first typologies built, with examples still remaining at Hunt Avenue **(Site 12)** and Amethyst Street **(Site 8)**. Religious organizations soon established congregations, building places of worship like St. Luke’s Lutheran Church **(Site 3)**, St. Martha’s Episcopal Church **(Site 11)**, the Van Nest Presbyterian Church **(Site 16)** and the B’nai Jacob First Van Nest Synagogue **(Site 5)**.

The rapid growth in population also required services and infrastructure to be expanded and improved. A new firehouse was erected at White Plains Road **(Site 9)** as well as a dedicated Central Office for the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau **(Site 2)**. By the early 1910s, a new railroad station **(Site 1)** and repair shops **(Site 17)** were built to serve the ever-increasing demand. The following decade saw churches expand their complexes to include schools **(Sites 7 and 14)** and other services for the community.

Early residents were predominantly Italian and Jewish immigrants, later including people from Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and African Americans. This has resulted in a rich and diverse neighborhood, rooted in its traditions as much as it has embraced change over the years. Family-owned businesses like Conti’s Pastry Shoppe **(Site 15)** and the Joseph A. Lucchese Funeral Home **(Site 13)** are notable examples of this, having stayed in operation despite changes in ownership.

Today, Van Nest remains a close-knit community with active civic organizations, with a built landscape that maintains a suburban feel.

## FORMER NEW YORK, WESTCHESTER & BOSTON RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

I

481 Morris Park Ave

(1912, Fellheimer & Long, Allen H. Stem  
Assoc.)

NYC IL / NR P



This Italian Renaissance structure was originally designed as a station and the administrative headquarters for the New York, Westchester and Boston Railway. It was part of the expansion of the railroad system in the early 20th century, aimed at serving new suburban communities.

The building was designed by Fellheimer & Long in association with Allen H. Stem. Both architectural firms had gained national recognition as experts in railroad stations, especially due to Stem's involvement in the design of Grand Central Terminal (NYC Landmark, 1967). The style was a nationwide favorite, with many of the line's smaller stations featuring similar characteristics.

The main façade has a three-story central section with

an arcaded loggia at street level. It is flanked by four-story projecting end pavilions with balaustered balconies, which give the effect of towers. It also features a clock framed by carved ornamentation, among them a winged head of Mercury, the Roman god of travel.

"The Westchester," as it was commonly known, was the first American railway of main-line form designed and built as an electric line. Unfortunately, it never made a profit and service was terminated at the end of 1937. The line was merged with the subway system and the building has served as the East 180th Street station ever since.

The station underwent major restoration work in 2011, which included restructuring and technical updates, as well as accessibility improvements. It was designated as a NYC Landmark in 1976, and listed on the National Register in 1980.

## LEGEND OF DESIGNATIONS

National Historic Landmark	NH L
National Register of Historic Places - District	NR D
National Register of Historic Places - Property	NR P
New York City Historic District	NYC HD
New York City Individual Landmark	NYC IL
New York City Interior Landmark	NYC INL

New York's fire alarm system was created during the 19th century, first through watchtowers with lookouts, which would later be connected to each other by telegraph. By 1871, a dedicated fire alarm telegraph system was constructed, consisting of public alarm boxes connected to a central office from which signals were relayed to the appropriate fire companies.

After the city's consolidation in 1898, new central offices were established in each borough to improve response time. Although the early decentralized offices were placed in existing fire department buildings, the

creation of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau in 1911 prompted the construction of new purpose-built offices. These buildings were sited on large open lots within city-owned parks, to protect them from potential hazards that could impact communications.

Located at the southern edge of Bronx Park, the Bronx Central Office is an Italian Renaissance Revival-style T-shaped structure clad in light brick and topped by a deep, terra-cotta cornice and hipped roof covered in Spanish tiles. A broad stoop leads to a recessed loggia screened by an arcade resting on a balustrade. It was dedicated in 1923, when it became fully operational.

The building, along with its twin the Brooklyn Central Office (NYC Landmark, 1966), was designed by the notable architect Frank J. Helmle. Born in Ohio, Helmle studied at Cooper Union and the School of Fine Arts of the Brooklyn Museum. During his partnership with Ulrich Huberty, he designed several bank buildings in Brooklyn, as well as the Boathouse and Tennis House in Prospect Park.

It was rehabilitated in the early 21st century, and continues to be an important part of the FDNY's communications system. It was designated as a NYC Landmark in 2023.

2

## FIRE ALARM TELEGRAPH BUREAU, BRONX CENTRAL OFFICE

1129 East 180th St  
(1913-15, Frank J. Helmle)  
NYC IL

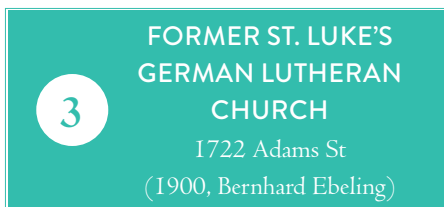




In October of 1898, the congregation of St. Luke's German Lutheran Church purchased this lot from developer Ephraim B. Levy. The following year, under the leadership of Rev. Gustav Walther Eickmann, a Board of Trustees was established and plans began for building a church. Born in Germany, Eickmann had recently married and was living in The Bronx. He and his family remained at this location for about 20 years, relocating to West New York, New Jersey, in 1920.

The two-story frame structure was conceived as a parish house and meeting room. The design was commissioned to Bernhard Ebeling, a young architect who had recently established his practice in Van Nest. Born in Germany, he was the son of prolific architect Frederick Ebeling, who designed the Varitype Building (NYC Historic District, 2010).

The church was sold in 2011 to another Lutheran congregation, and in 2013 it became an Islamic Center. *Photo courtesy of the NYC Municipal Archives.*



This two-story brick structure was originally a mixed-use building, with large openings on the first floor that previously had French doors. The second floor features two windows with wrought iron balconies and a central wall niche.

During the 1930s, it was the home of renowned German sculptor Henry G. Kreis, who emigrated to the US in 1924 and was part of the Works Progress Administration. He worked with his friend Paul Manship to create the "Prometheus" figure in Rockefeller Center.

From the late 1920s to the late 1970s, the building also served as the studio for German sculptor Carl Paul Jennewein. He emigrated to the US in 1907 and studied at the Art Students League in New York. After serving in the Army during WWI, he was awarded the prestigious Prix

de Rome which allowed him to spend several years studying sculpture in Italy at the American Academy. Among his most well-known works are the gilded bas-reliefs on the 50-foot limestone pylons that flank the entrance to the Brooklyn Public Library, four stone pylons for the 1939 World's Fair, various marble sculptures at the Rayburn House of Representatives Office Building, and sculptures at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In June 2011, an honorary street co-naming was unveiled to honor his 50 years of artistry in the Van Nest community. *Photo courtesy of the NYC Municipal Archives.*

## FORMER VAN NEST SYNAGOGUE

5

1712 Garfield St  
(1907-09, Henry Nordheim)



The B'nai Jacob First Van Nest Hebrew Congregation was organized in 1895 with 50 members, offering services in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English. In 1912 they established a Ladies' Aid Society, and by the early 1920s there was a school for 80 children.

Continuous growth allowed the congregation to purchase this plot at Garfield Street in 1905 for a new building, but construction wouldn't begin until 1907.

The design is the only documented religious structure by local architect Henry Nordheim, who had recently started his practice. Born in New York in 1878, Nordheim attended the Evening High School of Drawing and served in the US Navy during WWI. During his early career he mostly designed residential buildings, turning to the industrial sector in 1918 when he joined the Robins Conveying Bolt Company as Supervising Architect. Nordheim would later work for the Erie Railroad and the Hamilton Bell Company, with occasional commissions as an independent contractor.

In 1979, the congregation sold the building to its present owners, Mission Christiana Rehoboth Church.

## VAN NEST PARK AND MEMORIAL PLAZA

6

Intersection of Unionport Rd  
& Mead St  
(1922-38)



This plot was acquired by the City of New York in 1913, with maps noting the existence of an athletic club by 1919. In 1922, the property was placed under the jurisdiction of the Parks Department, with a second plot to the north added in 1938 that expanded the park to its current extent.

In 1926, the Van Nest Citizens' Patriotic League erected a memorial in the center of the original park. The monument was made of Deer Isle granite from Maine and honored the local soldiers who gave their lives in World War I. It was designed by architect Arthur G. Waldreaon. The surrounding area originally had Norway maple trees and a flagpole, all of which were removed.

Tributes to fallen soldiers of the Korean and Vietnam Wars were added to the side panels later on, and the memorial was rededicated by the Italian-American War Veterans' Bronx County Post #39 in 1973. In 1997, the park underwent a major renovation, with new playground equipment installed. The monument area was redesigned and upgraded in 2018, including the installation of a new flagpole. Memorial and Veterans' Day services were reinstituted in 2009.

## ST. DOMINIC'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH COMPLEX

7

1739 Unionport Rd - church & rectory  
(1925-27, Anthony J. DePace)

At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a growing Irish and Italian population in Van Nest, which prompted the Archdiocese of NY to open new parishes in the neighborhood. In 1924, Cardinal Hayes asked Father Dominic Joseph Fiorentino to build a new Italian-speaking church, which was to be called St. Dominic's. This was Fiorentino's second assignment as a priest. He had been born in Italy, emigrating with his family to the US in 1909, and became a relevant figure in the community.

The congregation initially met at 671 Morris Park Avenue, and by 1925 construction had begun on their church building. The design was the work of Italian born architect Anthony J. DePace, a prolific designer of Roman Catholic churches throughout the Northeastern United States. He resided in The Bronx most of his life, attending Morris High School and later studying at the Engineering and Architecture School of New York University. After working for prominent figures like Cass Gilbert, he partnered with Samuel Juster in 1923, leaving in 1947 to establish his own firm.

The one-story Romanesque Revival brick structure (**site 7a**) features an ornamented spoked rose window and colonnade at the main façade, with details in limestone and marble. The tower had bells manufactured by the Verdin Company Corporation, in Ohio. Unfortunately, due to damages to the wooden structure supporting them, two of them were removed in 2011. The church's altar is made of Carrara marble,

with stained-glass windows made in Munich, Bavaria. Artist Ernest Fabris created marble mosaic art pieces for the interior, most notably a portrait of Jesus crowned with thorns.

In 1956, a convent (**site 7b**) and school (**site 7c**) were built in neighboring plots, maintaining red brick veneer facades. In 2007, the church was merged with Our Lady of Solace to form a single parish. The school was converted into a public school, and the convent was renovated to become the parish's Faith Formation Center. *Photos: (top) St. Dominic's RC Church, (middle) Former St. Dominic's Convent, (bottom) Former St. Dominic's School.*





8

## HOUSES AT AMETHYST STREET

1808-1814 Amethyst St  
(1897-98, Samuel Sass)



practice in New York, and in 1899 he partnered with Max J. Smallheiser, with whom he designed numerous tenements and flats throughout the city. From 1905 until 1924, Sass returned to independent practice, later partnering with William C. Sommerfield. Examples of his work can be found in several historic districts in Manhattan, and in Park Slope.

Noted residents include Civil Rights activist Stokely Carmichael, whose family emigrated from Trinidad in the early 1940s, purchasing No. 1810 in 1953. He attended P.S. 34 and later Howard University, participating in the Freedom Rides organized by the Congress of Racial Equality. He is credited with the phrase “Black Power”.

Originally located at 1703 Unionport Road, the Van Nest Hose Company #1 was organized in 1906 before being disbanded and replaced in 1910. At the time, the recently created Fire Department of New York City was fostering the professionalization of firefighting, with new stations being built across the boroughs.

The design was by renowned American architect and painter Col. Francis Laurens Vinton Hoppin. Born in Providence, Rhode Island, Hoppin came from a prominent family, and attended Brown University and MIT. He continued his training in Paris, and in 1886 joined the firm of McKim, Mead and White, where he was regarded for his exceptional drawing skills. He established the firm Hoppin, Read & Hoppin in 1890, but left to partner with Terence A. Koen in 1896. They became well known for their police stations, fire stations, and Beaux Arts town and country houses. Hoppin retired in 1923 to pursue a career as an artist. He enlisted in the New York National Guard during the Spanish-American War, where he was granted the title of Colonel.

## ENGINE 90 VAN NEST HOSE COMPANY HOOK & LADDER 41

1843 White Plains Road  
(1910, Francis L. V. Hoppin)



10

## VAN NEST ASSEMBLY OF GOD

755 Rhinelander Avenue  
(1961)

The congregation for the Van Nest Assembly of God was organized in 1934 by a group of born-again women under the leadership of Pastor Silvio Margadonna. Originally known as the Italian Christian Church of Van Nest, they quickly rented a space at 1722 Adams Street, next to St. Luke's Lutheran Church, for Friday night prayer meetings. Monday and Wednesday evening services were soon added to the growing congregation, all conducted in Italian.

In 1943, they relocated to a two-story brick

building at 702 Rhinelander Avenue, where they also began offering services in English. In 1961, the congregation purchased a lot at the corner of Rhinelander Avenue and Holland Avenue and began construction of this one-story brick structure, which became their third and definitive location. The church has continued to grow and develop into a multicultural evangelistic organization, offering different programs and services to the community.

In 1907, the Archdeaconry of New York purchased this lot at Hunt Avenue to erect a new building for the St. Martha's Church. The congregation started out as a mission in 1901, meeting in a building at the north west corner of Morris Park Avenue. The church was also known as St. Martha's by the Boardwalk, due to the nearby Downing's Brook.

It is unclear who designed the wood-frame structure, but by 1908 it was a functioning church. By 1919, a Sunday school was built at the back of the lot, with a large parish hall added by 1927. Services continued to expand, with a nursery school opening in the mid-1960s.

During the 1980s, renowned LGBT+ rights activist Rev. Michael G. Koonsman served as Rector of St. Martha's Church. Originally from Denver, Father Koonsman was one of the city's most outspoken priests, and one of the founders of Integrity, a national organization of Gay Episcopalians. The group started as a small paper in 1973, quickly growing into a religious, educational and charitable nonprofit, with chapters in several cities in the US and Canada. He died in 1986 at the age of 42 due to complications related to AIDS, receiving several honors.

II

FORMER ST. MARTHA'S  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH1856 Hunt Avenue  
(1907-08)

This diverse yet cohesive group of houses are among the earliest developments in the northern section of Van Nest. The first one was No. 1820, designed by renowned architect Samuel Sass in 1897. Developers Abraham and Ephriam Levy continued with No. 1812 the following year, with Thomas Scott as the architect. They completed their venture in 1904 with Nos. 1810 and 1816, citing their brother David as the architect.

## HOUSES AT HUNT AVENUE

I2

1810-1868 Hunt Avenue  
(1897-1906, S. Sass, T. Scott, D. B. Levy, T. J. Kelly, B. Ebeling, T. F. Flood)



The second group was built in 1905, and included Nos. 1822-1826, designed by Timothy J. Kelly. Nos. 1828-1832 were by Bernhard Ebeling, the son of prolific architect Frederick Ebeling. He would also design part of the third group of houses, Nos. 1860-1868, built in 1906 by developer Lebas & Gordon. Nos. 1836-1846 were the work of Irish builder Thomas F. Flood.

Noted residents of this block include General William Fiorentino, whose family home was No. 1842. Fiorentino was the nephew of Fr. Dominic Fiorentino, founder of St. Dominic's Church. He graduated from Fordham University and the University of Alabama, joining the Army in 1956, where he had a distinguished career as project manager and executive officer.

## JOSEPH A. LUCCHESI FUNERAL HOME

I3

726 Morris Park Avenue  
(1921-22, Milton See & Son)



This two-story stone building was originally built by the Methodist Episcopal Church as their house of worship. The congregation was organized around 1830, and met at different locations before purchasing this lot in the early 1900s, where they built a wood frame structure. The design by Milton See would be among the last of the renowned architect, who passed away in 1921.

Born in Rochester, Milton See was a partner for almost 20 years at Cady, Berg & See, one of the most influential architectural firms in New York City in the late 19th-century. They produced many houses of worship and residences, but are mostly known for public buildings like the Metropolitan Opera House and the

Museum of Natural History. The firm dissolved in 1909 and See relocated to Mt. Vernon, where he established a new practice with his son Edward.

In 1937, the building was purchased by the Ruggiero & Sons Funeral Home, a company founded in Brooklyn in 1875 by Francisco Ruggiero. After remaining in the family for four generations, it was sold in 2012 to former employee Joseph Lucchese.

## OUR LADY OF SOLACE CHURCH COMPLEX

14

731 Morris Park Avenue  
(1928-29, Dunn, Money & Gilson - church  
and rectory)



Our Lady of Solace was the first parish established by the Archdiocese of NY in the early 1900s, to serve the growing Catholic population of Van Nest. The congregation was founded in 1903 by Father Daniel J. Curley, with services held at a wood-frame church built at the corner of Van Nest Avenue and White Plains Road. Soon, a rectory and two more structures that became a convent were added.

By 1914, the congregation had grown to 1400 people, and plans began to further expand the church complex. Two lots were purchased at the corner of Morris Park Avenue and Holland Avenue, and by 1927 the new parochial school and convent had been completed. The church and rectory began construction the following year, and were dedicated in 1929 by the parish founder Fr. Curley, who was now Bishop.

These two later structures are the only documented work of the firm of Dunn, Money & Gilson.

Thomas F. Dunn was a New York architect who studied at the College of the City of New York and Columbia University. During the early years of his career, he worked at various firms and practiced independently in Manhattan and The Bronx. In 1921, he partnered with Fred E. Gilson and designed several schools, convents and rectories for Catholic churches, including the Corpus Christi Church, the St. Monica RC Church, and the Holy Trinity Church in Manhattan. He returned to independent practice in 1930, and passed away in 1943.

15

## CONTI'S PASTRY SHOPPE

786 Morris Park Ave

(Ca. 1928)



and in 2005 the building underwent a series of renovations including replacement of the display windows and restoration of the tin ceiling and wood panel walls.

In 2021, to honor Conti's 100th anniversary, the NYC Council declared the south side of this block of Morris Park Avenue Conti's Pastry Shoppe Blvd.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Van Nest Presbyterian Mission occupied a two-story frame structure at the corner of Morris Park Avenue and Holland Avenue. In 1907, the congregation purchased this lot to build a new church, designed by the renowned architectural firm of James E. Ware and Sons.

The one-story brick chapel features a simple layout. The entrance is framed by a three-point arch and carved terra cotta ornamentation, as well as two lampposts and a wrought iron gate. In 1917, a parish house was added to the southwest side of the building.

Born in New York, James E. Ware studied at the City College and began his practice in 1869. He was an early pioneer in the design of fireproof warehouses, and would become known for developing the "dumbbell plan" in 1879. By 1900, both of his sons had joined his firm, designing multiple types of buildings. Among their most renowned works are the Osborne Apartments, the 12th Regiment Armory City, and the Suburban Homes Company's First Avenue Estate.

In 1926, the congregation merged with the Methodist Church, maintaining services at this location. In 1990, the building was sold to the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Augustino Conti arrived in New York at the beginning of the 20th century. Born in Parma, Italy, he quickly found work as a baker and by 1921 was able to open his own business at 653 Morris Park Avenue. In 1931, the family purchased this building at 786 Morris Park Avenue and relocated the business.

The three-story brick structure was built in the late 1920s, with a layout that provided ample space for the bakery on the first floor and basement, and two apartments on the upper floors. Ornamentation on the façade was kept simple, mostly through two-toned brickwork.

Conti's soon became a neighborhood staple, offering not only classic Italian pastries, but also French baked goods. In 2001, the family sold the business,

16

FORMER VAN NEST  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

800 Morris Park Avenue

(1907, James E. Ware and Sons)





## FORMER NEW YORK, NEW HAVEN & HARTFORD RAILROAD VAN NEST ELECTRIC LOCOMOTIVE REPAIR SHOPS

17

Bronxdale Ave, between East Tremont Ave, Baker Ave, White Plains Rd and  
Unionport Rd  
(1912-29, New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Co.)



At the beginning of the 20th century, the expansion and electrification of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad caused the company's facilities at Stamford to become insufficient and prompted plans for a larger repair shop. The location was chosen for its proximity to the freight yards on the Harlem River, which had remained largely undeveloped, providing ample room to build the complex.

In 1912, construction began on a two-story brick structure for the main shop, as well as secondary structures like a warehouse, powerhouse and blacksmith shop. Operations began in early 1914, and by 1929 there were 15 small ancillary buildings and a large new addition on the south side of the main shop. By then, all locomotives and multiple unit (self-propelled) electric and diesel cars of the company were serviced at these shops.

During the 1930s, the Railroad underwent serious financial difficulties, but by 1947 they were out of bankruptcy. That same year, The Freedom Train Exhibit made a stop at the Van Nest Station. Unfortunately, in 1954-1955 damages caused by a hurricane and flood left the company once again in financial distress. Initiatives like the "Zoo Train" were implemented to increase ridership, but during the late 1950s the railroad began disposing of property and equipment. The Van Nest Repair Shop was vacated in August of 1959, and operations were relocated to New Haven. That same year, Con Edison purchased the facilities and repurposed them to service their vehicles and equipment. Many of the ancillary buildings were demolished, but about five of them were maintained and adapted for new uses, including the main shop building. All of the freight tracks were either removed or paved. *Photo courtesy of the East Bronx History Forum.*

This unique Second Empire house was built in 1901 by Friedrich A. Lingsch as his family home. The three-story brick structure, designed by architect Joseph W. Limer, features a mansard roof with dormer windows, decorated window surrounds and a columned portico.

Born in Britain, Limer emigrated to the US in 1880 when he was 19 years old. Not much is known about his life, but he had an active architectural practice in The Bronx in the late 1890s and early 1900s. He relocated with his family to Warren, North Carolina in the 1910s, and eventually went into farming.

Friedrich Lingsch was a piano maker who established his own factory in 1905, developing improvements for pianoforte-actions for upright pianos. He emigrated from Austria to the US in 1887, and initially settled on the Upper East Side. After getting married, Lingsch built this house in Van Nest and remained there for almost 30 years, making interior modifications in 1902 to convert it into a two-family home. By 1930, the family had moved to White Plains Road and the property had been sold to Joseph LaQuanti, an Italian builder.

## FORMER FRIEDRICH A. LINGSCH RESIDENCE

I8

1669 Holland Avenue  
(1901, Joseph W. Limer)



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