Summary

Creator: Bigelow, John, 1817-1911

Title: John Bigelow papers, 1839-1912

Size: 22.9 linear feet (37 boxes, 76 volumes)

Abstract: John Bigelow (1817-1911) was an American author, editor and diplomat. His papers consist of correspondence, diaries, writings, and other papers relating to his career as editor of the New York Evening Post, as inspector of prisons in New York State, as United States Consul and Chargé d'Affaires at Paris, France, as Minister to the Court of Napoleon III, as United States Commissioner to the Brussels International Exhibition (1888), and as friend and advisor to Philippe Bunau-Varilla on the selection of the Panama route and the construction of the Panama Canal. Includes correspondence and documents relating to prison reform in New York State, the construction in France and England of warships for the Confederate Navy, the movement of Confederate ships in European waters, Confederate activities in Europe, the establishment at the Académie française of the Botta Prize, and the fitness of John C. Frémont for the Republican presidential candidacy in 1856. Also, manuscripts and typescripts of Bigelow's writings on various subjects, and correspondence with William Cullen Bryant, John Hay, William H. Huntington, Samuel J. Tilden, and other notable persons.

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Preferred citation: John Bigelow papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library


Creator history

John Bigelow was a newspaper editor, Civil War-era diplomat, and author. He was born in Bristol (now Malden), New York, and, when not in Europe, lived in New York City near Gramercy Park, or at his home, “The Squirrels,” at Buttermilk Falls (now Highland Falls), New York. After a period of studying law, teaching, and writing for the newspapers, Bigelow was appointed an inspector at Sing Sing State Prison in 1845 with the help of then New York State Assemblyman Samuel J. Tilden. Bigelow, influenced by Tilden, had joined the Free-Soil Democrats in 1844.

Leaving Sing Sing in 1848, Bigelow became co-owner and co-editor, with William Cullen Bryant, of the New York Evening Post. During his years at the Post, Bigelow married Jane Poulney (1850); traveled to Jamaica (1850), Haiti (1853), and Europe (1858-1860); began reading works of Emanuel Swedenborg in 1854; and campaigned for John C. Frémont, the Republican Party’s first presidential candidate, in his 1856 race.
From 1861-1864 Bigelow served as President Lincoln's consul to Paris where his efforts were aimed at influencing the French in favor of the Union cause. While in Paris Bigelow managed to stop the sale of ships being constructed in French shipyards to the Confederacy. In 1865 he was made chargé d'affaires to France, thus remaining there until 1867.

After a two month period as editor of the New York Times in 1869, Bigelow returned to Europe, living in Germany from 1879 to 1873. In 1875, back in the United States, he was appointed by Tilden, now governor of New York, to be chairman of the Erie Canal Investigating Commission. The Commission was formed to investigate the activities of the "Canal Ring," a group of state officials and contractors who were diverting money meant for the maintenance of the Erie Canal. That same year, 1875, Bigelow, now a member of the Democratic Party, was elected New York Secretary of State.

After the 1870s Bigelow spend most of his time writing and editing. His remaining public responsibilities included his role as an executor of the Tilden Trust and in the founding of The New York Public Library; traveling to Panama in 1886 to prepare a report of the progress of the Panama Canal as a guest of the Panama Canal Company and a representative of the New York Chamber of Commerce; in 1888 he was commissioner of the United States section of the Brussels International Exhibition; and in 1893 he was a delegate to the New York Constitutional Convention.

Bigelow was the author of numerous books and articles. These included biographies of Benjamin Franklin, Samuel J. Tilden, William Cullen Bryant, and others; a campaign biography of John C. Frémont; an autobiography; books and articles about French and American history and foreign relations, Swedenborgianism, Haiti and Jamaica, and a variety of other topics.

**Scope and content note**

Five boxes contain general correspondence, 1849-1911, dating from early in Bigelow's career until his death. Correspondence is with colleagues, public figures, family members, and friends, and concerns professional and personal matters, and public affairs. The bulk of the letters were written by Bigelow. Major or prominent correspondents include: Charles Francis Adams; George Bancroft; William Cullen Bryant; Philippe Bunau-Varilla, a chief engineer of the Panama Canal, Panamanian representative to the United States during the Panama Revolution, and a friend (copies of Bunau-Varilla's letters to people other than Bigelow concerning the Canal are included); Samuel L. Clemens; J. Copping; Charles A. and Richard Henry Dana; John Dix; Anton Dohrn; Richard Watson Gilder; Parke Godwin; John Hay; J. Henderson; E.P. Hurlbut; Louis Kleke; Kohlisch, the gardener at “The Squirrels,” reporting on house and garden matters and village news, M.D. Lasker; Henry Parry; Wilhelm Platenius; Isaac Seligman; William H. Seward; George T. Trimble; Martin Van Buren; John C. Fremont; Adele Granger; Herbert M. Hover. Recipients of Bigelow’s letters include: Nelson M. Beckwith, an American living in Paris who advocated an improved railroad system in the United States; Anne and Vincenzo Botta; James Brooks; John Bright; William Cullen Bryant; Philippe Bunau-Varilla; Georg von Bunsen; Andrew Carnegie; Hamilton Fish, Parke Godwin; Lionel Guest, Bigelow’s son-in-law; William Hargreaves; John Hay; George Hoadley; Herbert M. Hover; Kohlisch; J.P. Morgan; Frances Parker; L.V.F. Randolph; Whitelaw Reid; Theodore Roosevelt; William Russell; William H. Seward and others. A few letters are in French or German.

Also included are significant groups of correspondence with his friends Charles and Fanny Campbell Eames, 1844-1906, relating chiefly to personal matters; William Henry Huntington, 1864-1885, concerning Huntington’s collection of Benjamin Franklin material, book collecting, and general matters; Samuel J. Tilden, 1860-1887, concerning the public affairs; William H. Seward, 1856-1868; publishers of his books, 1862-1912, and related contracts, agreements, and accounts; and his sons John, Jr. and Poultney, daughters-in-law Mary and Edith, and grandson Braxton.

Correspondence, reports, accounts, legal documents, notes, and memoranda dating from Bigelow’s periods as consul and chargé d'affaires in Paris concern general consular matters. Some specific topics discussed include: European reactions to Lincoln’s assassination; the death of James H. Dickson; the buring of the steamer William Nelson; Confederate activities in Europe; construction of ships in France for the Confederate navy.
Also included are: correspondence, reports, and other documents, 1845-1855, concerning Sing Sing State Prison; correspondence with John C. Fremont and his wife, author Jessie B. Fremont, and others concerning Fremont’s 1856 presidential campaign; correspondence with related accounts ad printed material, 1865-1894, concerning the United States Treasury Department’s claim, made during the 1880s for funds owed Bigelow since his period as consul. Bigelow’s vindication, and the claim against the government by the heirs of Joseph Binda (died 1864), who had been a United States Consul at Leghorn, for salary owed him; correspondence with Anne Botta, Vincenzo Botta, and others, 1871-1883, relating to the establishment of the Botta Prize, a prize awarded by the Académie Française to the author of the best work on the condition of women. Anne Botta provided the funds for the prize and Bigelow assisted them with the arrangements. Correspondence, accounts, and other documents, 1886-1889, relate to Bigelow’s position as commissioner of the United States section of the Brussels International Exhibition in 1888. Bigelow’s correspondence, printed and typescript addresses, speeches, articles, and other writings, 1886-1909, by Bigelow, Philippe Bunau-Varilla, Theodore Roosevelt, and others, concern the Panama Canal.

Miscellaneous pocket diaries, appointment, address, and memoranda books, 1858-1911; notes, memorabilia; and bound material are included.

John Bigelow’s diaries form an important component of the collection. These 39 volumes cover the years 1843-1911, documenting his professional life, travels, personal and family matters, and public affairs. Separate travel journals describe Bigelow’s trips to Jamaica (1850 January –March), and Haiti and St. Thomas (1853 November – 1954 February).

Arrangement
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Key terms
Subjects
Awards -- France
Diplomatic and consular service, American -- France
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Journalism -- New York (State) -- New York

Occupations
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John Bigelow papers

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b.18  Copy of the report of Thomas T. Craven, Commander of the USS Niagara, and papers related to the departure of the Confederate ram, Stonewall, from the harbour of Ferrol, Spain

b.18  Documents relatifs aux Affaires Etrangers. Accompagnants les message Annuel du Président pour la premier session du 39e Congrès, 1865 Dec 4 (Printed at Washington D.C. Incomplete.)

b.18  France and the Rebel States (Incomplete manuscript by Bigelow)

b.18  Intelligence reports by unknown agent or agents outlining opinion in France and England concerning the Civil War, 1861Oct-Dec

b.18  List of United States vessels destroyed by Confederate cruisers, 1861-1865.

b.18  Memorandum from Loubat on the North’s blockade of Charleston, S.C.

b.18  Miscellaneous notes and memoranda.

b.18  Seizure and surrender of Confederate agents, John Slidell and James Mason

b.18  Letter dated Nov. 28, 1872, from William Gladstone to General Schenck, U.S. Minister at the Court of London (Printed. Harper’s New Monthly Magazine.)

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v.25 Consular diary, 1864 Jan 1-1865 Jan 6
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   Paper by Gustav Schwab read at the meeting of the American Institute of Mining Engineers at New Haven, Conn., Feb. 24, 1909
b.24 Address delivered by Philippe Bunau-Varilla, Nov. 17, 1903.
b.24 Description of a method [for the construction of the Panama Canal], 1905 Mar. 27
b.24 Discours de Monsieur de Lanesson…en l’honneur de Monsieur Philippe Bunau-Varilla
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b.24 Liquidation of La Compagnie Universelle du Canal de Panama, and the formation of La Compagnie Nouvelle du Canal de Panama.
b.24 Note on a possible transaction equally fair, honorable, and advantageous to the U.S. and the Panama interests, by Philippe Bunau-Varilla
b.24 Notes and miscellany
b.24 Panama and Nicaragua Canal Problem: Its Solution, by [Philippe Bunau-Varilla] (Typescript)
b.24 Panama Canal, La Passée: Present et l’avenir by Philippe Bunau-Varilla
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Panama Canal, 1886-1909 (cont.)

- Printed reply by Philippe Bunau-Varilla to an editorial in the New York Evening Post, Aug. 8, 1906.
- Quelques faits certains sur les origines de la revolution de Panama.
- Questions asked by Bigelow pertaining to the Panama Canal.
- Record of a meeting of the Engineers' Club of Philadelphia, 1886 May 15 (Printed)
- Speech by Howard C. Hollister made before the Literary Club of Cincinnati, 1904 Apr 9
- Speech by Theodore Roosevelt on the Panama Canal, 1903 Apr 2
- Summary of different plans for the Canal
- Trois appel à la France pour sauver l'oeuvre de Panama, by Philippe Bunau-Varilla (Pamphlet)
- Two draft versions of an article by Philippe Bunau-Varilla on the attitudes of Colombia, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua to the construction of the Panama Canal.
- Obituary of George S. Morrison

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- Document appointing Bigelow and R.H. Mace a committee to confer with Hudson River Railroad Company, 1847 Apr 14
- Rough draft of agreement between Board Inspectors of Mt. Pleasant Prison and Hudson River Railroad locating Right of Way.
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[SOYSON?], Hyacinthe, (1) 1883. Copy.
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[STILLE?], Dr. Charles J., (1) 1887. Draft.
STODDARD, [Richard Henry], (1) 1888. Draft.
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SUN, Editor of the, (1) 1906. Copy.
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TILTON, Newall D., (2) 1907, 1909. Copies.
TRANCONIERE, General, (1) 1866. A.L.S., 3p.
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WOODS, Mrs., (1) 1895. Draft.
WORLD, Editors of The, (1) 1899. Draft.
WRIGHT, Marcus L., (1) 1904. Copy.
ZOGBAUM, Rufus, (2) 1886.

Letters received, 1841-1911

ADAMS, Charles Francis, (1) 1863. 1p.
ALEXANDER, George, (1) A.L.S., 1p.
ANDREW H. GREEN Memorial Association, (1) 1906. 1p.
BANCROFT, George, (1) 1873. A.L.S.,1p.
BECKMAN, J.P., (1) [1849?]. A.L.S..
BEYLAND, Dr., (1) 1863. A.L.S., 4p.
BIBLIOTHEQUE Universelle, (1) 1904.
BRAUNWORTH, Mumm & Barber, (1) 1895.
BRYANT, Julia, (1) [882]. A.L.S., 4p. (1) 1882, AL, 4p.
CAMBRELING, C.C., (1) 1846. A.L.S., 1p. Written to Eben Seeley and probably passed on to Bigelow.
CHAMBER of Commerce of the State of New York, (1) 1902.
CLARK, Gaylord, (1) 1852. A.L.S., 1p.
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GRANGER, Adele, (1) 1850. A.L.S., 2p. and (3). A.L.S., undated
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HASTINGS, H., (2) 1868, 1869. A.L.S.
HAY, Clara, (1) 1907. A.L.S., 3p.
HENDERSON, J., (6) 1861-1866. A.L.S.
HILL, David B., Gov. of New York, (1) 1883. 1p. Encloses letter to Hill from Skipworth.
HOLDEN, Edward S., (1) 1903. Copy.
HOUGHTON ?, (5). A.L.S., undated
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JEFFERSON, Charles, (2) 1911. A.L.S.
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KERR, Bessie, (2) 1892. A.L.S., 1p.
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PHILOCLEAN Society, (2) 1842, 1843.
PATENIUS, Wilhelm, (3) 1872. A.L.S.
POST, Lydia, undated
Powell, Andrew, (1) 1886. A.L.S., 1p.
REID, Whitelaw, (1) 1892. T.L.S., 1p. Includes letter from John Bigelow to John Bigelow. Jr.,
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ROELKER, Bernard, (3) 1846, 1849, 1850. A.L.S.
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WILLIS, N.P., (2) 1857, 1858. A.L.S.
WINSOR, Justin, (2) 1887. A.L.S.
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[FORTOUL], F., (1) 1863, to Le Président du Tribunal Civil de Lyon.
[GLEESON], John, (1) 1866
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[LOMBARD], Allen, (1) 1863, to James Brooks.
[MANGUM], Willie P., (1) 1865: encloses letter from C.M. Walker to Bigelow.
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LE ROUX, Jules, (1) 1863.
LEAVY, George, (1) 1862.
LECOMB & Cie, (1) 1863.
LEE, E.B., (1) 1863.
LEGRAND, Eugenie, (1) 1863.
LEONARD, Ezra, (2) 1863.
LESLEY, James, (6) 1862, 1863, 1865.
Letters relating to the assassination of President Lincoln
LEWIS, David, (1) 1864, to James Brooks.
LHEREBETTE, Kane & Co., (2) 1863, to James Brooks.
LIAIS, Edouard (1).
LIAIS, Edouard, (5) 1864, 1865, 1866.
LYONS, J.H., (1) 1863, TO James Brooks.
LYONS, J.H., 1863, to James Brooks.
MACÉ, ?, (1) [1863].
MARAVAL, ?, (1) 1863, to James Brooks.
MARCH, Clement, (2) 1864.
MARIETON, ?, (1) 1862.
MARTIAL, C., (1) 1864.
MARTIAL, C., (1) 1864.
MARTIN, John Stephen, (1) 1865.
MARYE, Helen, (1) 1864, to James Brooks.
MAY, Antoine, (1) 1862.
MC CURDY, Richard, (1) 1863.
MC DOWELL, James M., (1) 1863.
MEDON, ?, (2) 1863.
MÉRIGOT, Antoine, (1) 1863.
MEXIQUE à Paris, Consulat du, (1) 1864.
MICHEL, L.B., (1) 1862.
MITJAN & Cie, (1864).
MONTAGNIE, John de la, (1) 1866, to John Hay.
MONTAGNIE, John de la, (20) 1864, 1865: June 6th encloses extract of letter concerning Mexico. 1866, n.d.
MONTAGNIE, John de le, (2).
MORRIS, Dwight, (1) 1866, to John Hay.
MORRIS, Dwight, (2) 1866.
MORRIS, E.J., (1) 1865.
MORRIS, E.J., (1).
MORSE, Freeman H., (1) 1865.
MORSE, J.H., (1) 1865.
MOSELL, Préfet de la, (1) 1862.
MUM & Cie, (1), 1863.
MURPHY, W., (3) 1863.
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NICOLAY, J., (7) 1865: July 21st encloses letter to Nicolay from Jean-Baptiste Cochener.
NORD, Le [Journal], (1), 1863.
NOURISSAT, ?, (1) 1862.
ODIN, ?, (1) 1862.
OOTHONT, Henry, (2) 1863, to James Brooks.
OPDYKE, George, (1) 1862. Encloses letter from John J. Diehl.
OPPENHEIM, E., (1) 1862.
OSTERHAUS, P., (1) 1866.
OSTERHAUS, P., (4) 1866, to John Hay
PAGE, Charles A., (1) 1866, to John Hay.
PAY BAS, Consulat Général des, (1) 1863.
PEABODY & Co., (1) 1863.
PEASE, F., (1) 1862.
PENNINGTON, W.S., (1) 1862.
PERRAVEX or PERRAVEZ, J., (1) 1864
PERRY, William R., (1) 1862.
PERSE, Consulat Général de le Shah de, (1) 1863.
PHELPS, William Edwin, (1) 1863.
PHILLIPON, E., (1) 1862.
PILATTE, Leon, (1) 1865.
Piper & Co., (1) 1864.
PITET Aine & Liddy, (1) 1862.
POIRIER & Cie, (1) 1862.
POLICE, Préfecture de [Paris], (3) 1862, 1864.
PORTUGAL à Paris, Consulat de, (1) 1863.
PUTNAM, James, (5) 1863, to James Brooks.
PUTNAM, James, (8) 1863, 1864, 1865: June 28th encloses copy of despatch from Seward to Putnam. July 1st encloses letters from Kerros to Putnam. October 16th encloses copy of letter dated October 5th from U.S. Consul at Cherourg to Putnam. 1866.
RAMOIN, Jean-Baptiste, (1) 1863.
REISNER, G., (1) 1862.
RENAUD, P., (1) 1863.
ROBINSON, Edward, (3) 1866, to John Hay.
ROBINSON, Edward, (3) 1866: encloses list of exports from Strasbourg.
ROLLER, S., (1) 1863.
ROUGE, ?, (1) 1866.
ROUGEMOTT, ?, (1) 1862.
ROUGET, Marie, (1) 1862.
RUSSIE, Consul Général, (1) 1863.
SANNARD, Eugene, (1) [1863]
SAUER, George, (3) 1863, 1864.
SCHENKING, August, (1) 1866.
SCHENKING, B., (1) 1865.
SCHLOSS, M.I., (1) 1862.
SCHWARZMANN, August, (2) 1862.
SEGOUX & Cie, (1) 1862.
SLADE, William, (2) 1865.
SMITH, P.B.L., (1) 1862.
SMITH, Thomas P., (14) 1862, 1865, 1866.
SOURIS, ?, (1) 1863.
ST. MARIN, Légation de le République de, (1) 1863.
TOWLE, George M., (2) [1866], 1866, to John Hay.
TOWLE, George M., (2) 1866.
TRÉFOUSSE, M.J., (1) 1862.
TUCK, Edward, (1).
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VAN CAMPEN, George, (1) 1863.
VAN HORNE, George W., (14) 1862, 1863, 1865.
VAN HORNE, George W., (3) 1864, 1865, to James Brooks and John S. Martin.
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VINCENT, A., (1) 1863, 1864.
VIOLLIER, Louis, (1) 1864, (23) 1864, 1866
VIOLLIER, Louis, (1) 1864, to James Brooks.
VIOLLIER, Louis, (2).
VOGEL & Cie, (3) 1862, 1864.
WARDEN, Francis, (1) 1862.
WATSON, Marie B., (1) 1862.
WEHRY, G., (1) 1862.
WOOD, H., (1) 1864.
ZIMMER, F., (3) 1862.
V. Miscellaneous correspondence and papers, 1845-1909

Botta Prize, 1871-1883

Letters from John Bigelow

BOTTA, Ann Charlotte, (3) 1871, 1874, 1883.
MOREAU, H., (2) 1874

Letters to John Bigelow

BOTTA, Ann Charlotte, (4) 1875, 1883
MOREAU, H., (3) 1874, 1875, extracts.

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BOTTA, Ann Charlotte to M. Patin, Secretaire Perpetuel de l’Academie Francaise, 1874
BOTTA, Ann Charlotte to H. Moreau, n.d.

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BLAINE, James G., (1) 1889
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[HEFLER], ?, 1888.
MC FARLAND, J.E., (12) 1888.
RIVES, George, (5) 1888, 1889.
SHWARZKOPF, E.E., (3) [1888], 1888, 1889.
SLADE, William, (4) 1888, 1889.
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DELOYE & Cie, (2) 1888.
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COLFAX, Schuyler, (1) 1856, to Bigelow.
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CHAMBERLAIN, William, (2) 1847. Drafts.
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FARNHAM, E.W., (1) 1846. Copy.
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FOWLER, L.N., (4) 1846, n.d. A.L.S.
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PAIN, John C., (2) 1846. A.L.S.
Powers, James, (22) 1846-1848. A.L.S.
ROWELL, Hiram, (5) 1845, 1846, 1848, 1851
TRUCKS, John P., (3) 1846, 1847. A.L.S.
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