

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER, 1993

Next Meeting !

WORLD WAR II: 50 YEARS LATER

50 years have passed since World War II, but memories remain strong and clear in the minds of Hightstown and East Windsor residents who lived through those times.

On Monday November 15th at 7:30 PM, the first of a series of panel discussions about World War II will be held in the Fellowship Hall of the First Presbyterian Church on North Main Street in Hightstown. Panel participants will be the following: Herbert Davison was the Chief Company Inspector of the parachute manufacturing and packing operation of the Hightstown Rug Company, Hightstown's foremost material contribution to the war effort. George Dubell, who served in combat in the

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FAR-FLUNG HIGHTSTONIANA!

Important Hightstown/East Windsor Map Found in Clinton

Much of what we know about the general development of Hightstown and East Windsor in the nineteenth century comes from maps of that period. Local historians are well aware of the Mercer County map that was published in 1849, which contains the earliest published map of Hightstown. And the Society has been selling reprints of the East Windsor and Hightstown maps that were published as plates in the Everts & Stewart Mercer County atlas of 1876. But few have been aware of an important map of Hightstown published in 1860, which occurs as an inset on the Lake and Beers *Map of Philadelphia, Trenton, & Vicinity...*, a large wall map that contains insets of many towns and villages of central New Jersey. Hightstown historians Alpheus and Lillian Albert reproduced it as a plate in their 1957 centennial history of the First Presbyterian Church, but they mis-labeled it as a map of the early 1870s. In fact, it shows Hightstown on the eve of the Civil War. Making it even more important, the Hightstown inset also includes

a business directory, listing the merchants, tradesmen, and professional people who worked in town at that time. The main body of the Lake & Beers map also includes East Windsor mapped at a smaller scale, showing building locations and names of property owners.

Copies of this map have been hard to find, and copies in good condition that can be examined are even more rare. Although both the New Jersey State Library and Rutgers University Library hold this map, neither has allowed researchers to use them because they are in fragile condition and cannot be unrolled. Firestone Library at Princeton University holds a black-and-white photocopy of a small part of the map, including a portion of East Windsor. Fortunately, however, the Clinton Historical Museum in Clinton, New Jersey also holds a copy in very good condition, recently conserved and encapsulated. The Museum has courteously agreed to allow our Society to photograph the Hightstown inset for research purposes. ■



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November

- 1 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)
- 15 General Meeting, 7:30 (1st Pres. Ch.)
- 30 Holiday Greeting Card replies due

December

- 6 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)
- 12 Christmas Tea, 2 - 5 (Ely House)

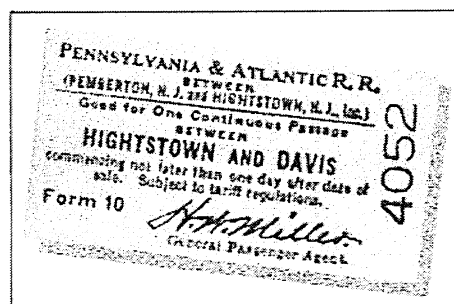
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WORLD WAR II

Army in the European theater of operations, was a member of the 104th Infantry Division, "the Timberwolves," which fought in Belgium, Holland, and Germany. Mcrae Sugg served with the Flying Tigers and will tell of his experiences flying over "the Hump" of the Himalaya Mountains from India to China, a perilous flight necessitated by Japanese control of sea routes. John W. Orr Jr. served on land and sea in the South Pacific as a radio and radar operator and technician. John will relate, through his latest "Reflections from the Shrine" article, his experiences in remote island communication stations. Edgar Thomas will serve as the panel moderator.

The public is invited to this highly informative and free event about a world-changing time in our nation's history. ■

GET YOUR TICKETS FOR THE "OLD U.T."



The Society has a limited number of early 20th-century train tickets for sale! These are original tickets issued by the Union Transportation Company (the "old U.T.") for passage between Hightstown and each of 10 stops enroute to Pemberton, the southern end of the line. The U.T. was the company that operated the Pemberton & Hightstown Railroad, which linked up with the Camden & Amboy Railroad near where the freight station originally stood. Sets of 10 tickets (one for each stop on the line), mounted and suitable for framing, are available for \$75. Supplies are limited. To order, contact Bob Craig at (609) 586-4702. Proceeds will benefit the station restoration fund. ■

The LIFE and TIMES of JOHN and MARY HIGHT

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the third and concluding installment of Robert Craig's biographical sketch of the Hights, delivered at the March 1992 general meeting. It is continued from the September/October newsletter.]

The Hights as Baptists

Baptist records tell about another side of the Hights' lives. Both John and Mary belonged to the Cranbury Baptist Church for almost fifty years. But what drew them to that faith is unclear. If the explanation of John Hight's background is correct, Baptism had no roots in his family, for he seems to have been reared in a Quaker household, some of whose members converted to Anglicanism. If he shared the same, conservative outlook, he might have joined the Baptists because they were the organized alternative to the Presbyterians of the region. Presbyterians had churches in both Allentown and Cranbury by 1740, were growing rapidly, and they practiced what historians have called a "New Light" evangelism, which was unpopular with Quakers, Anglicans, and Baptists. The first pastor of the Cranbury Baptists, James Carman, had once been a New Light himself, but then "repented," according to an early Baptist historian, and lived the rest of his life a strong opponent of such theology. That the Hights belonged to this church is strong evidence that they were not New Lights either.

But their commitment to the Baptist faith was less than enthusiastic. They were frequently guilty of non-attendance. In March 1750, the elders at their quarterly meeting chose Thomas Morford to "Speak to our Brother John Hight and his Wife Concerning their Neglect." And even when they did attend, they evidently did not always participate fully. On that August Sunday in 1751, the assault on Hight took place while worship was still going on. One witness told the court that the encounter between Hight and Ashfield took place "After Preaching was over, the Sacrament Affairs Still Continuing." It was the first Sunday in August, one of

the four Sabbaths each year when the church administered the Lord's Supper. But this event also demonstrates that, contrary to the popular notion of "blue laws," taverns were not always closed on Sunday in the colonial period, and that part of Hight's problems with the Baptists probably stemmed from his need to tend his own tavern.

As the decade continued, the Hights' "neglect" evidently became chronic, for by the next time they were mentioned in church minutes the church leaders were ready to take action. In October 1756, they firmly declared,

"whereas John Hight, a Member in this Church has for a Considerable Time Past Absented Himself from his place in the House of God to the Great Dishonor of Religion and the Dissatisfaction of the Church for which Reason they thought proper to Lay sd. Hight Under Church Sensure [sic] As a person Not in Church Communion with them Until he Give Satisfaction to the Church for his Neglect."

Pastor Carman died shortly thereafter, and an eight-year gap in the records conceals whether Hight gave satisfaction. In April 1765, shortly after recordkeeping resumed, Mary Hight was called to account for neglect. She acknowledged her fault a few months later, and her apologies were accepted. A year later, in June 1766, "John Hight, Having Confessed his fault [was] received into Communion in the Church." The congregation had been in a weakened state since Carman died, when it was unable to support another pastor. Preaching was carried on by the elders for ten years until 1766, when Isaac Stelle, the Baptist minister at Piscataway, came to supply the pulpit for a year. Membership soared while he was there, and Hight's return coincides roughly with Stelle's arrival, but after Stelle left the following year, membership plummeted again, and chances are good that the Hights were among the several families who lost interest.

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The Children

The Hights' children were never mentioned in the Baptist records. Evidently none of them were baptized into the church of their parents. Joseph Haight would later support the Episcopal Church in Monmouth County. John Jr. was twenty years old in 1751, and his youngest sibling was possibly less than ten years old. The 1750s were a decade of stability for the Hights. The family continued to live in and operate the tavern and to farm their small holdings. John and Mary, having secured their own position, began to help find livelihoods for their children. John Hight Jr., the oldest son, married Hannah L. Richards in 1758, but there is no record of where or how they met or precisely where they lived during their marriage, though they continued to live somewhere in Windsor Township. Joseph Haight married Rebecca Griffith of Philadelphia on June 4, 1761. According to Pullen, they eventually left the Hights-town area and moved to Monmouth County, where he acquired a farm near Colts Neck.

In September 1760, John Hight took on a partner, Vincent Dye, to buy what had been known as the "Foulerton" tract, which was bounded by Hight's land on the east, Rocky Brook on the south and west, and the Millstone River on the north. They hired a surveyor and in April 1761 divided the land between them, with Hight keeping the half that bordered his 80-acre tract. The same day, he sold a 50-acre slice along his boundary with Dye, reducing his share to about 150 acres. We do not know how Hight used this extra land, but the timing of the purchase suggests that one of his grown sons, possibly John Jr., may have worked it. John Jr. and his wife Hannah bore their first child in 1760 and their second the following year, and they seem to have lived somewhere in the Hightstown area.

Hight showed further prosperity in the 1760s by buying back the gristmill. In 1764, the mill was bought by a Perth Amboy lawyer, who sold it again in 1766. At that point, John Hight stepped in and bought it back. This time it was an investment, not merely a holding action until another buyer could be

found. The property had been improved with the construction of a sawmill and a blacksmith shop on an adjoining six-acre lot south of Rocky Brook. On the tavern property a storehouse was created and a store kept. Sometime after 1765, Hight also bought the 79-acre tract that abutted the east side of his 80-acre lot of 1747. With this purchase, his landholdings reached a peak of just over 300 acres, and with his ownership of both a tavern and the local gristmill, he was clearly a leading figure in the eastern end of Windsor Township.

Naming the Village "Hytes Town"

Without question, these years were the pinnacle of John Hight's career. Even though a second tavern had been opened to compete with his, he was still the leading figure at Rocky Brook. And it was at just that time that his name became attached to the growing village. The earliest known usage of any variant of the name "Hightstown" came in 1765 in a deed for the 79-acre tract that Hight later bought. In that document, the Wyckoff Mills Road was called "the road from Hytes Town to Cosman's mills." The name stuck. The old phrase, "Rocky Brook," continued to be used to refer to the stream itself, but its use as an address ended completely. Newspaper advertisements began using the new name, and maps of New Jersey soon followed suit.

Approaching retirement

In 1767, Thomas, the youngest of John and Mary's three known children, was married. With all three sons married, John Hight evidently began to plan his withdrawal from active business. He first turned over his tavern business to Thomas. At the October term of the Middlesex court, Hight petitioned that he "hath Resigned up his said Bussiness of Publick house keeping unto his said son Thomas Height." Thomas had married a local woman earlier that year, and Hight helpfully informed the court that his son was "a married man." The court gave its assent, allowing Thomas to keep tavern "in the house where John Hight lately kept tavern in Windsor." But this plan soon went awry. Keeping his father's tavern apparently did not satisfy Thomas for long. He renewed

the license in 1768, which authorized him to operate through most of the following year, but by 1770 he had given the business back to his father, who had continued to own the building. Thomas evidently left the Hights-town area permanently at this time, and there is no further trace of him in local records.

John Hight renewed the tavern licence in 1770 and evidently began looking for a buyer. He began to gradually sell his assets. In October 1771 he found a buyer in John Bainbrige, who was probalby a relative of Absolom Bainbridge, the owner of Bainbridge house in Princeton. Bainbridge also bought Hight's mill property and the major portion of Hight's 80-acre tract. He tried to operate the tavern, renewing Hight's licence for 1772, but he couldn't keep it going. He was falling deeply into debt. He leased the tavern to another keeper in 1773, but his financial problems grew still worse, and by September of that year he was forced to turn over his Hightstown property to a long list of New York and Philadelphia creditors. A year later, they sold the tavern to Robert Nixon, a Cranbury man who would become a local militia leader during the Revolution.

The year that Nixon bought the tavern was also, the year of the First Continental Congress. That year John Hight finally disposed of his major assets. On June 10th, he sold to a neighbor the Rocky Brook farm he had bought in 1760. Six months later, on December 10th, he sold the 79-acre tract to Anthony Applegate, a tenant who was already living there. All he had left was a thin strip of land on the west side of North Main Street, minus the tavern, the remaining part of his first purchase in 1747. Five months later the war began at Lexington and Concord.

Hight During the Revolution

In May 1776, Hight struck a deal with Bainbridge's creditors, who were still holding the mill property. He bought back the mill and the fifty acres that Bainbridge had bought from him five years before. Except for the tavern, he got back what he had sold in 1771. It was his third ownership of the mill,

but it was the briefest and it came at the stormiest of times. The Provincial Congress had taken over effective control of New Jersey, and less than seven weeks later, the Continental Congress declared the independence of the United States of America. The war was coming to New Jersey.

Hight took little part in the war, and no direct part in the fighting. He evidently acted with enough patriotism that after the war his friends could say he had been "a good friend to his country," but even at the outbreak of the war he was upwards of seventy years of age, too old to be forced to serve in the militia. That summer and fall, the Continental Army—including at least a few men from the Hightstown area—were routed from Long Island, Manhattan, and White Plains, and then were surprised at Fort Lee. Washington was forced to retreat across New Jersey into sanctuary in Pennsylvania. The British Army and its Hessian allies occupied a string of outposts south to Princeton, Trenton, and Bordentown.

When the Americans won the Christmas victory at Trenton, the Hessian outpost at Bordentown became too isolated to remain secure, so the mercenaries struck camp and marched through Crosswicks, Allentown, Hightstown, and Cranbury before turning left to rejoin the British forces still at Princeton. Plundering as they went, the Hessians stole from many people along the route, including Hight. He later reported that they took from him one two-year old heifer, a new beaver hat, one tea kettle, a pair of silver shoe buckles, a new apron and a pair of stockings, one new shirt, and beef, pork, and bread worth two pounds. He lost goods with a sterling value of ten pounds, eighteen shillings, and six pence—about three months wages for an average workman.

Whatever the cause, Hight decided not to keep the mill property; perhaps he couldn't afford to keep it. In April 1777, he sold it for the last time. But it was a disastrous time to trade real estate for paper money. Savvy merchants were doing just the opposite. As the war continued, the Continental currency collapsed in a fever of hyperinflation, dropping to less than a

thousandth of its prewar value. People whose assets were in cash were wiped out. Hight was one of the casualties. Even in March 1779, when he sold a tiny house lot on the east side of North Main Street, the 110 pounds he received for it could not have lasted long. His finances soon were rather desperate.

It was evidently this desperation that led him in 1781 back into the tavern business. He petitioned the Middlesex court that he had "formerly kept a tavern at Hights Town & now [was] desirous of keeping one again in a house near the Mills." The court agreed, and he continued for at least four years, possibly longer, to conduct this business, which in one document was referred to as a "dram shop." Apparently he was selling liquor to the public from his home, but neither furnishing overnight lodging nor livery service. As a result, he seems not to have been running a full-service tavern, but more nearly what would be called a bar today. Probably almost eighty years of age, he may no longer have been capable of running a tavern, for he no longer had the help of his sons. The house where he was then living was probably too small to compete with Hightstown's other, larger taverns. From other records, we know that Hight lived alone with Mary on a five-acre lot at the northeast corner of North Main Street and Wyckoff Mills Road.

Those who signed his petitions supported his plea for sympathy from the Middlesex court. The 1784 petition stated in part that he "had lost his estate by reason of the depreciation of the Continental money as he has sold his mills and plantation for said money... & has no other ways to get his living." As further evidence of his destitution, it urged the court to give Hight a license without charging him the usual fee. The petition described him as "an old man."

Universalism

After the war, the Cranbury Baptists revived their congregation, in the process moving to Hightstown in 1785. But once again, John and Mary's lukewarmness toward the church became an issue with the elders. On

October 2, 1784, they indicted John Hight and several others for "Non Attention of Christian Duty." Samuel Mount was appointed to speak to Hight. On October 25, Mount reported back to the elders, and they voted to suspend Hight from communion again. By October 1785, a year later, Hight and his neighbor Jacob Jemson, a local cooper, were in much deeper trouble with the elders. They were accused of believing in "universal redemption," a very serious heresy among Baptists but the cornerstone of Universalism, which was then in its infancy as a religious movement. The first Universalist preaching in America took place in New Jersey at a place called Good Luck in what is now Ocean County, and Jemson's wife Rebeckah may have been the daughter of one of the first Universalists there. In April 1786, the elders agreed not to proceed against John Hight "As there Appears a Hope of his Return." Hope indeed seems to have influenced the elders' decisions each time that Hight's conduct was reviewed. Perhaps the proximity of the new meetinghouse, opened the preceding November, had something to do with their decision as well, since the elderly Hights would no longer need to travel to Cranbury to attend worship. At that April meeting, however, Jemson was not so lucky. He was "Cut off from amongst" the church "till he Expresses his Desire to Return by Unfeigned Repentance." Hightstown would become remarkable in the nineteenth century for its Universalist church, but the local foundations for that faith were laid in the 1780s by the Jemsons and by John Hight.

The Last Years

Through the decade, the Hights lived in the small house where he ran his dram shop. But in May 1789, they sold this house and lot, their last landholding, and disappeared briefly from the historical record. We do not know where they lived out their last years, or what their circumstances were. John Jr. lived somewhere in Middlesex County (probably somewhere in Windsor) and may have taken them in. He reported John Sr.'s death to the Middlesex court on February 27, 1792—200 years ago last month—and he was named administrator of the estate. John Hight died

intestate; there is no will naming his heirs. His death, and that of Mary, who died within months of her husband, furnish another mystery. No one knows where they were buried. The Baptists had already started a graveyard behind the new meetinghouse in Hightstown, and a list of the graves in the form of a map has been made. But neither of the Hights are on it; as far as is known, they weren't buried in the Baptist churchyard. An oral tradition has held that the Hights were buried in a small plot along Wyckoff Mills Road, but other evidence suggests that others were buried there instead. Were they scorned in death for their universalism? The baptismal records of this church show how each member's connection was finally severed. John Hight's name, which appears on the very first page along with the other original members, has the word "dead" next to it, meaning that he went to his grave still a member. So also with Mary. However, in September 1792, in its yearly report to the Philadelphia Baptist Association, the church reported listed that it

had lost three members (all women) by death since its last report the preceding September. Among the three mentioned was Mary Hight. John Hight's death during the same interval was overlooked.

Conclusion

The Hights can indeed be credited for founding the village of Hightstown and being its namesake. Their gristmill in 1747 gave a focus to the eastern end of Windsor Township, and thus foreshadowed the establishment of East Windsor Township. They did not come to Hightstown in 1721, even though we do not know precisely when they did come. John did not start out with large landholdings; indeed, the pattern of his life was that of a man who struggled upward from owning nothing to having an estate that was well above the average for his time. Yet he lived long enough to lose his estate, and he died about as poor as he grew up.

In their prosperity, the Hights lived far from the bottom of colonial soci-

ety, but they were distant from the top as well. John Hight was widely known in Windsor Township and in Cranbury. He was known by the other
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HIGHTSTOWN / EAST WINDSOR
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

founded 1971

Serving Hightstown Borough and East Windsor Township

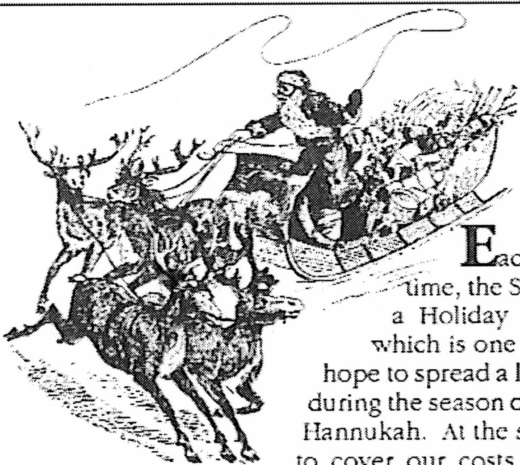
Mailing address: Ely House 164 North Main Street Hightstown, NJ 08520

Officers for 1993-94

- Robin Smith**..... President
- Joel Larson**..... Vice-President
- Clifford Pullen**..... Recording Secretary
- Lois Groendyke**..... Corresponding Secretary
- George Dubell**..... Treasurer

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- Clark Hutchinson**..... Library
- Robert Craig**..... Newsletter
- Joel Larson**..... Membership
- Bud Perrine**..... Property
- John Kilbride**..... Train station



A WORD ABOUT THE 1993 HOLIDAY GREETING CARD

Each year at this time, the Society sponsors a Holiday Greeting Card, which is one of the ways we hope to spread a little good cheer during the season of Christmas and Hannukah. At the same time, both to cover our costs and to raise a

small but very needed revenue for the Society, we ask our subscribers to contribute a small amount for their names to be inscribed on the card. In the past, we've published the card in the local newspapers, both the Gazette and the Herald, in what amounted to a display advertisement. The card has been popular, not only among our members but also with quite a few friends of the Society, who, while they did not wish to join us, did desire to extend their greetings to our membership.

In the last couple of years, however, with newspaper rates increasing sharply, more and more of the subscribers' contributions were ending up being paid out to cover costs. As a result, we are seeking a better way to get the card out to our subscribers, members, and friends. Last year we mailed it out as a special edition of the newsletter. Candidly, though, bad logistics hampered our good intentions, and the card was not as well produced as we would like. This year,

we intend to try again, hopefully with a greater headstart and better results. Since time to prepare the card is quite limited, we hope our subscribers will fill out the form below, which will reduce the number of phone calls that have been needed in the past, and thereby save time. Please contribute \$12 for an individual name and \$15 for a family. Checks may be made payable to H.E.W.H.S.

.....
• Detach along this line Holiday greeting card

• Name(s) [as you would like them to appear on the card]

• _____

• _____

• Your name _____

• _____

• Evening telephone no. _____

• **Please send your replies by November 30th**

• to Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society, c/o William W. Craig, 12 Dover Lane, East Windsor, NJ 08520.

• Please mark on the envelope "Holiday Card"

.....

EAST WINDSOR COMMISSION NEEDS MEMBERS

The East Windsor Township Historic Preservation Commission, a body appointed to administer East Windsor's historic preservation ordinance, needs additional members. Anyone with an interest in local history and old buildings may serve; East Windsor residency is preferred but not required. Inquire by calling Commission Chair Lisa Goldman, 426-4737, or Township Clerk Elizabeth Nolan at 443-4000. ■

GOOD ATTENDANCE AT SEPTEMBER MEETING

The September 20th general meeting was well attended, with both a large number of Meadow Lakes residents and members from other parts of the community present. Altogether, nearly 70 people came out that night, one of the largest gatherings for a general meeting in recent years. They heard past-president David Martin's fine paper on Clara Barton's 7-month stay in East Windsor, one of the great episodes in our local history. ■

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The LIFE and TIMES of JOHN and MARY HIGHT

tavernkeepers in the county, and he surely had some contacts among merchants in New Brunswick, Perth Amboy, and probably Philadelphia and New York City. But on the county level he was a minor figure, and his brief tenure as constable was his only public office. Obviously, he never rose to a prominent position in church circles. But however limited his influence was, he also had passing acquaintance with great men of the period. In at least one court case to which he was a party, the lawyer for the other side was Elias Boudinot, who would later sign the Declaration of Independence and preside over the Continental Congress. And when Hight bought the gristmill for the last time, the lawyer for the seller was Francis Hopkinson, who would also sign the Declaration of Independence only two months later and design the American flag the following year.

The village that began with Hight's

gristmill in 1747 was named for him in the 1760s. It is ironic that the name stuck so quickly and with such permanence, because the Hights were finished as an influential family here in little more than a decade after its first usage. Their son Joseph settled in Monmouth County and achieved some prominence there. Joseph's son took advantage of the spirit of opportunity that opened up after the war. Although John Hight may never have ventured further than Philadelphia or New York, his grandson took ship to China in 1796 and wrote an account of the voyage that has been preserved at Rutgers. And in the nineteenth century, one of Joseph's grandsons became Speaker of the General Assembly and represented Monmouth County in the state constitutional convention of 1844. But Thomas left Hightstown before the Revolution for parts unknown, and John Jr. apparently left shortly after his father died. Although Pullen found some descendants still living in central New Jersey, after about 1800 the Hight family no longer lived in the town that still bears its name. ■

**Hightstown-East Windsor
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