

# FIRST STATE HERITAGE PARK

ANNUAL REPORT  
Fiscal Year 2023



 First State  
**Heritage Park**  
HISTORIC SITES

# SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

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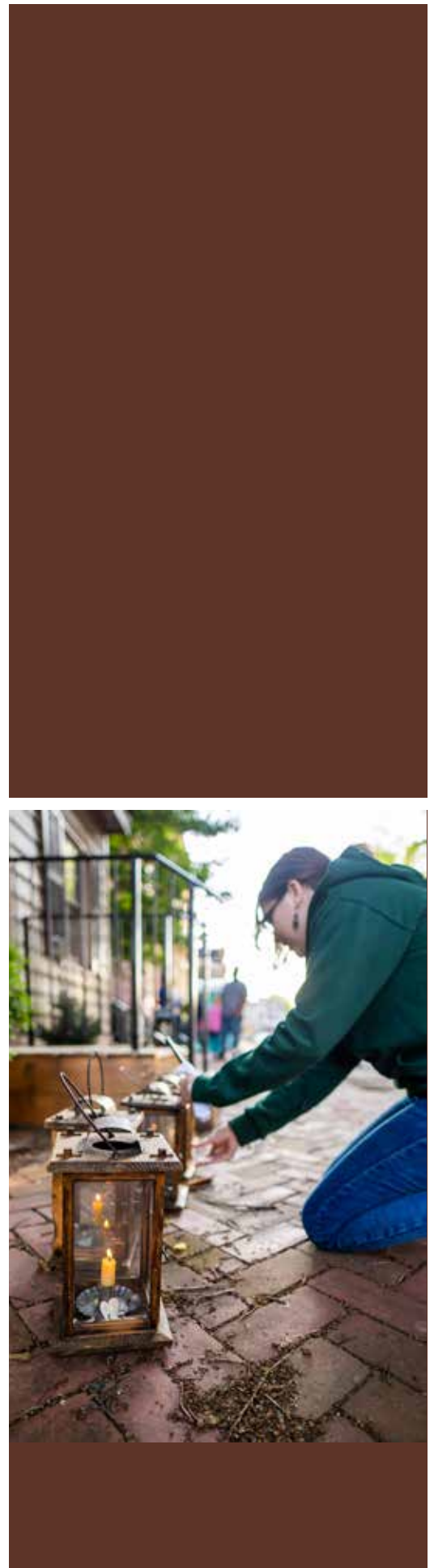
Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 was a unique and fun year for First State Heritage Park (FSHP). It was marked with innovation for new programming, our first foray into a (successful) fundraising event held at Fort Miles Historic Area, expanding Market Fair to an entire weekend and a strong push for farther and innovative outreach initiatives. Staff and visitors are seemingly out of the COVID-19 time of worry and our visitation across the board continues to rise as FSHP staff continue to prove to the public that they love what they do.

Losing the park's interpretive programs manager toward the end of the fiscal year did not halt programming for the park. Prescheduling programming and events meant that the new Historic Programs Manager Nicole Rogers was able to step in and learn the workings of the park while also adding her own expertise and flair into creating a new slate of exciting programs and events. The staff seem reinvigorated and are ecstatic as we move into the new fiscal year with seemingly unending ideas for the direction of FSHP and the John Bell House as the world of the historic house museum changes around us.

I am looking forward to what this small but mighty park can achieve in the coming years as we press closer to the Revolutionary War 250th Anniversary.



**NICOLE WORTHLEY**  
Park Superintendent



# PARK HISTORY

First State Heritage Park became Delaware's first "urban park without boundaries" in 2005 when Gov. Ruth Ann Minner signed Executive Order No. 55 into law. The Historical Park Task Force was comprised of leaders from the community and various historical organizations who came together to lay the foundations of the park that exists today. First State Heritage Park combines the talents and history of several Dover sites including Delaware Public Archives, Biggs Museum of American Art, Old State House Museum, Johnson Victrola Museum and the John Bell House Interpretive Center. Staff from the DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation provide various thematic walking tours of The Dover Green, Legislative Hall, Christ Church cemetery, Methodist cemetery, Presbyterian cemetery and Woodburn - The Governor's Mansion.



## MISSION OF FIRST STATE HERITAGE PARK

- To interpret historical and cultural resources of Delaware's Capital City of Dover
- To foster among both Delawareans and visitors a deeper understanding of Dover's historical significance and contributions of the city and its residents to the history of Delaware and of the nation
- To encourage stewardship of Dover's historic buildings and natural areas and documentation of its rich history
- To raise the visibility of Delaware's capital as an attraction for heritage tourists by creating and marketing a more comprehensive and cohesive picture of the cultural assets of Dover and its historic significance to the State of Delaware

# VISITATION

Program Attendance: 5,089

Walking Tours: 815

John Bell House General Attendance: 2,150

Group Tours: 433

School Tour Programming: 232

Legislative Hall: 1,721

Woodburn and Hall House: 478

Outreach: 7,794

**Total for DSP Managed Sites: 18,712**



Biggs Museum of American Art: 4,382 (programming only)

Delaware Public Archives and Welcome Center: 6,664

Johnson Victrola Museum: 2,269

Old State House Museum: 5,518

**Total for Partner Managed Sites: 18,833**

**Total for all FSHP sites: 37,545**

**Increase of 69% for Delaware State Parks managed sites from Fiscal Year 22**



# JOHN BELL HOUSE

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This small 1740s building serves as First State Heritage Park's Interpretive Center and heart of the park. The John Bell House is where staff present programming and welcome visitors to learn the history of Dover as well as begin their walking tours of The Green. First State Heritage Park continued professional education by continuing extensive research, taking part in professional classes, attending conferences and other museums and historical sites to expand their knowledge and repertoire. Staff also worked behind the scenes to continue expanding our programming slate to include brand new walking tours, outreach programs and new interactive programming.

## Leadership:

### **Park Superintendent:**

Nicole Worthley

### **Interpretive Programs**

#### **Manager:**

Ryan Schwartz (Until March)  
Nicole Rogers (Starting April 24)

#### **Lead Interpreter:**

Rachel Sheffield



# DELAWARE PUBLIC ARCHIVES AND WELCOME CENTER

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## Leadership:

**Director:** Stephan Marz

**Media Relations:**  
Corey Marshall-Steele

**Information Resource  
Specialist:**  
Dawn Mitchell

**Information Resource  
Manager:**  
Edward McWilliams

**Welcome Center Supervisor:**  
David Littleton

# BIGGS MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

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## Leadership:

**Director:** Charlie Guerin  
(Until June 30)

**Curator of Community and  
Academic Programs:**  
Kristen Matulewicz

# OLD STATE HOUSE MUSEUM

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## Leadership:

**Director:** Tim Slavin

**Deputy Director:**  
Suzanne Savery

**Sites Manager:** Dan Citron

**Site Supervisor:** Nena Todd

**Lead Interpreter:**  
Gavin Malone

# JOHNSON VICTROLA MUSEUM

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## Leadership:

**Director:** Tim Slavin

**Deputy Director:**  
Suzanne Savery

**Sites Manager:** Dan Citron

**Site Supervisor:**  
Christopher Hall

**Lead Interpreter:** Vacant

# FIRST STATE CLUB

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The First State Club continues their high-quality work supporting not only First State Heritage Park, but Milford High School and the communities of Dover and Milford. The students researched, created and presented their own First Saturday programming with success detailing the struggles faced by African Americans during school integration, focusing mainly on the events surrounding the Milford Eleven. Throughout the year, the students can be found at various Dover and Milford events such as the Capital Tree Lighting and Milford's Ladybug and Riverwalk festivals. Presenting programming at various events, the club serves as the park's foremost asset to connect with a wider audience outside of the Dover area. Staff interacted with 5,665 visitors this past year.

To honor their hard work throughout the year, the students qualified for the Presidential Volunteer Service Award working a total of 697 volunteer hours, with many of the students individually qualifying for their own bronze and silver awards.

In addition, Superintendent Nicole Worthley was able to attend the Milford High School Senior Award night to present the Caesar Rodney Excellence Award to Jasmine Hibbitts, one of the club's graduating seniors. The recipient of this award values and imbues the traits of Caesar Rodney, excels and displays their leadership skills, commitment to public service and perseverance, enhances the mission of FSHP through volunteer work, program development and presentations to the public and sets the standard for how the club works with FSHP. By learning these skills, the student will become better prepared for college and their future career.

This year was also the first for all graduating seniors to earn and wear special First State Club graduation stoles as the club qualified for them according to the school's standards.

To round out honoring the club's achievements, the First State Club was also nominated and was a recipient of the Governor's Youth Volunteer Service Awards for their work throughout the year. They were honored with a reception dinner and recognition by Gov. John Carney.





# STAFF HIGHLIGHT

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First State Heritage Park staff are honored to now have a Mohr-Jennings Award winner within the ranks of the park.

The recipient of this prestigious Division of Parks and Recreation award must display excellence in at least two of the following categories: interpretive skill, cooperation with other state parks, commitment to the mission of the division, passion for their work, innovation and visitor engagement. This year's winner, FSHP's Lead Interpreter Rachel Sheffield, excelled in all these categories.

- **Commitment:** Rachel consistently measured up to and surpassed the standards set by First State Heritage Park, the Division of Parks and Recreation and the museum industry.
- **Cooperation:** Rachel stood out in this category as the lead for the successful Homefront Holidays fundraising event in conjunction with Fort Miles Historic Area.
- **Innovation:** Always the problem solver, Rachel improved clothing issues with a more efficient clothing organization and care system as well as being the first staff member to achieve their full first-person persona for the park.
- **Interpretive Skill:** Rachel would never present any of her work without ensuring it is truly based in accurate research. From clothing stiches to full events, Rachel is welcoming, upbeat and comprehensive in ensuring visitors receive an accurate and thoughtful program.
- **Passion:** In all aspects, it is clear Rachel loves history and presenting it to the public. She will always go the extra mile, find the little details to enhance a program and come up with creative ways to do it all with little cost to the park.
- **Visitor Engagement:** Her outgoing personality is the star of the show when Rachel is working with the public and even behind the scenes. Visitors who interact with Rachel always have nothing but amazing things to say about her and her work.



# BUDGET AND REVENUE

Since 2005, First State Heritage Park’s \$250,000 budget is allocated to Delaware State Parks from the Delaware Department of State per a memorandum of agreement. This covers salaries for park staff, programming supplies, marketing, contractual supplies and more. In addition, FSHP is supported by Park’s shared services including marketing, creative services and online presence.

The superintendent’s position is paid through the Division of Parks and Recreation budget, while the historic program manager’s position continues as a New Castle Conservation District position. All FSHP causal seasonal staff were also given their state of Delaware mandated raised reflective of the state’s effort to bring the minimum wage up to \$15/hour.

Through programming and donations, FSHP brought in \$7,000 in revenue.

**Interpretive Program Manager:**  
\$65,015.32 for Ryan, \$7,558.65 for Nicole’s remaining FY23 Contract

**Seasonal Salaries:** \$113,200

**Capitol Police PO:** \$11,000

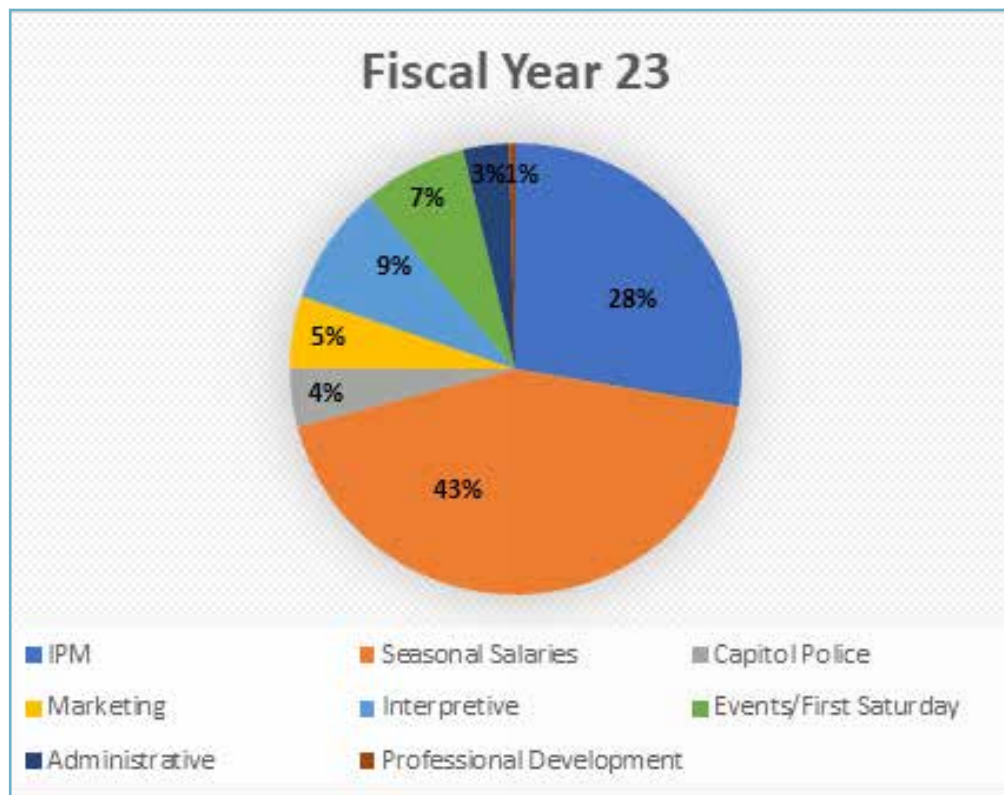
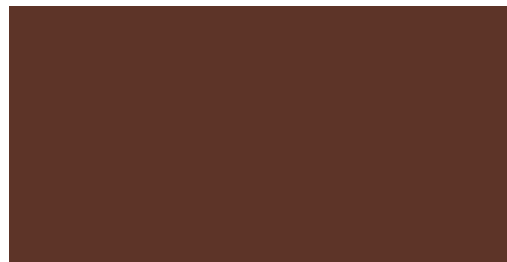
**Marketing:** \$13,500

**Interpretation/Programming:**  
\$22,476.03

**Events and First Saturday:**  
\$19,550

**Administrative:** \$8,600

**Research and Professional Development:** \$1,250



# PROGRAMING HIGHLIGHTS

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## First Saturdays in the First State

Besides major events such as Market Fair and the Victorian Picnic, the FSHP First Saturdays in the First State were popular, bringing in **592** throughout the year. By adding major events into the total, First Saturdays saw an increase to **3,541 visitors** attending the park's programs and events which is nearly an increase of 1,000 visitors from FY22.

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*"Alex and the whole team did a fantastic job holding this important discussion/program. It was clearly well researched and a lot of effort was put into it. Great job by all!"*

Visitor to "Delaware and the Black Codes" program

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*"Looking forward to attending one of these walking tours as well weather permitting. Genuinely appreciate all your help and am excited for this visit! Regards, Raj"*



# PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS

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## Increased outreach

Our staff took up the challenge to increase our own outreach visitation by researching new outreach opportunities, creating new programming and traveling off the East Coast. Lead Interpreter Rachel was asked to return to not only her high school in Louisiana, but also her college alma mater to give a presentation on her work with historic textiles and the history of fashion. These programs were wildly popular with the local community and students to both schools and allowed Rachel to expand our audience and encourage new students to pursue historical textile work and interpretation.

Some other outreach opportunities included returning to sites such as Killens Pond State Park summer camp, outreach to other parks, the Delaware State Fair and new spots such as Blue Rocks Stadium and Valley Forge National Park homeschool day! These outreach initiatives allowed staff to interact **with 2,173 people** who otherwise would not have visited the park.

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*“Rachel was so patient and knowledgeable about 18th century garments, I really enjoyed this class and I hope to take more.”*

Winter Workshop visitor

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# EVENTS

## Dover Comic Con

Dover Comic Con continues to be a large city of Dover event bringing in new audiences to let their nerd flags fly. Returning to offer free hand-cut silhouettes, Lauren Muney continues to be a huge draw for visitors to the John Bell House. Staff dressed in their own historically inspired popular culture outfits including Edwardian Star Trek red shirt, Victorian 11th Doctor from Doctor Who and Bridgerton. The True Crime walking tour is increasingly popular as was the superhero mask craft sponsored by Milford comic shop Red Bandana. Throughout the day, FSHP staff interacted with **301 visitors**.

## Dover Days Return

After a several year hiatus due to COVID-19 and a hurricane cancelling it in 2022, Dover Days finally returned to the city with a bang. Adding Friday night fireworks and activities, FSHP offered a free Dover Green lantern tour as part of the night's events in which **69 people** attended.

As a new addition, Lead Interpreter Rachel pulled volunteers and staff from across state parks to assist in a historical fashion show featuring clothing made by her representing fashion from 1770-1945. With plenty of intriguing questions afterward, **148 people enjoyed the show**. The First State Club had a blast helping with the traditional maypole for **189 visitors**. Throughout the day, **135 people** visited the John Bell House.



*"Good morning Nicole. Thank you for all your behind the scenes efforts which made the Dover Days Celebration and Parade a success. I appreciate your help early in the morning on Saturday and Thursday eve. It was a great weekend and you made a difference. It was my pleasure to work with you the past 6 months. Thank you, Ron"*

*"I'd like to add my congratulations for a wonderful Dover Days program this year. I spent most of my time in our museum, but did have the opportunity to snatch a few minutes at the fashion show during a lunch break. Really fun and informative!!"*

Ellen,  
Friends of Old Dover

# EVENTS

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## Woodburn Illuminated

Despite the park's second incarnation of Woodburn Illuminated occurring the same night as the Dashing Through Dover parade, the increasingly popular event brought in **334 visitors**. Returning to the event was a slate of high school choirs performing various holiday pieces on the front steps of Woodburn, free tours of the Governor's Mansion, appearance by the governor himself, House of Coffi selling drinks and various craft tables. The new addition to the evening was Santa Claus, who was portrayed by one of the interpreters from the Johnson Victrola Museum.



## 18th Century Market Fair

In efforts to continue expanding and improving the Market Fair, the 12th Annual iteration of the event was expanded to include the entire weekend. Taking place both Saturday and Sunday proved to work well with **1,492 visiting Saturday** and **798 visitors** coming out Sunday. In total, the visitation exceeded previous years as visitation to the event continues to increase since it was canceled in 2020 and had a reduced capacity in 2021 due to COVID-19.



# EVENTS

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## Saving the Past, Shaping the Future

Continuing the strong partnership with First State National Historical Park, FSHP staff worked with FSNHP to participate as presenters for the event and serve as an organizing and coordinating partner. Funded by a National Parks Service grant, this event allows fourth graders from both New Castle and Kent counties to attend a day of rotating stations covering the various histories of Delaware and programming based in historic preservation. The October 2022 programming hosted **331 students** with May 2023's programming seeing **265 students**.

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*"Thank you both so much for volunteering your time and expertise for our students! They always enjoy your presentation so much. We are so grateful that you could spend the day with us."*

South Dover Elementary School Teacher

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# EVENTS

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## Homefront Holidays

The FSHP's first foray into a fundraising event, Homefront Holidays was successfully put together by staff of FSHP and Fort Miles Historic Area. Tickets to the event allowed visitors to take a ride in the "Deuce" and a half truck-decked out in holiday decorations, enjoy a buffet dinner and live music by FSHP interpreter Madi Coleman and the World War Tunes, swing dancing lessons and a tour of Battery 519 at Cape Henlopen State Park. Selling 69 tickets at \$90 each, the holiday event was successful and mirrored World War II Christmas military celebrations. Many visitors expressed interest in buying more tickets for the next event of its kind.

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*"Please do this event again in 2023, as we have friends and family we'd love to bring to this wonderful evening! Cheers!"*

Visitor to Homefront Holidays event

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*"This was fun! And we really enjoyed all the music & dancing. The venue is awesome!"*

John





# EVENTS

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## Lantern Tours

Lantern Tours continue to be a successful paid program for the park despite several evenings having to be canceled due to severe weather and hurricanes in the spring. Despite these cancellations, FSHP sold 183 tickets and brought in \$2,350 in revenue.



# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

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## Archaeology

In anticipation of the construction of the bathroom and storage unit behind the John Bell House, Dovetail Cultural Resource Group will be conducting a full archaeological investigation in the backyard as a salvage operation as no more digs will be able to take place once the building is built. FSHP staff are looking forward to what information Dovetail may be able to find as that area of the yard has only been surface tested for artifacts in the past.

## Grants

The new historic programs manager comes to First State Heritage Park with a background in successful grant writing for other historic sites and museums and planned to use that experience at FSHP. Her first plan of action, working with the superintendent, was to apply for the National Endowment for the Humanities Planning grant. This grant is awarded to small- to mid-sized institutions for up to \$40,000 to assist sites in planning new interpretive themes and reaching out to consultants to aid in the process. FSHP was able to complete the grant application which was submitted and cleared through the Clearinghouse Committee. Staff will not know if the grant is awarded until May 2024.





First State Heritage Park  
102 South State Street  
Dover, DE 19901

[destateparks.com/History/FirstStateHeritage](http://destateparks.com/History/FirstStateHeritage)

Delaware Department of Natural Resources  
and Environmental Control  
Division of Parks and Recreation  
89 Kings Highway  
Dover, DE 19901  
[destateparks.com](http://destateparks.com)



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