ustralian Country Hospital Heritage ssociation Inc.

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2012

President's Report

The first quarter of 2012 has gone very quickly, and already there has been one Market Day, and one major tour of the Hospital Museum. The Museum tends to increase in popularity each Market Day.

The first major tour to the Museum occurred in March when Members of the University of the Third Age arranged for their routine monthly outing to be a guided tour through the Museum. U3A Members met at Arnolds, and while enjoying morning tea, Yvonne gave a much appreciated overview of the Museum's origins. Morning tea was followed by guided tours through the Museum and its archive area.

As part of the Committee's endeavours to make each repeat visit by the public to the Museum of continued interest and in keeping with the strategic plan, proposed focused displays have commenced under the coordination of Ashley and Errol. The first display, pictorial and written, portrayed the history of the Museum itself, and created much interest with visitors, and members.

The next display will feature Nurses in War Service, and will be in place in honour of Anzac Day. The displays will stay in place for four to six weeks. Be sure not to miss any.

The program for International Nurses' Day is well in hand and promises to be both interesting and entertaining. IND 2012 will be held at CQUniversity on Saturday 12th May, and will consist of a Professional Development Workshop from 12.30pm to 5.30pm followed by refreshments prior to the evening session commencing at 6pm. The theme for the evening session is "My Generation meets Q and A". (The "My Generation" panel will have Nurses from the following generations: "The Builders", "The Baby Boomers", "Gen X" and "Gen Y"). Questions will be invited from the audience, and participants will be asked to identify artefacts from both the past and the present.

Retired Nurses interested in attending the workshop session will need to register and pay \$20. The evening session is free, but donations will be welcome.

As part of an ongoing desire of both the IND Committee and the ACHHA Management Committee to capture anecdotal stories of how it was for the Student Nurse during training days, an appeal has been launched for nurses to tell of their experiences. In particular we are interested in stories about the experience of living in Nurses' Quarters, and the experiences of student nurses who were the pioneers of the University based system. We are calling for nurses to take time to write to us of their experiences. These stories after editing will be collated into a book to be launched at next year's IND Celebrations. Some examples of such stories will be available for reading at the IND Function.

Information concerning the program for International Nurses' Day is on a small flyer included with this newsletter. Please send anecdotal stories to ACHHA, PO Box 4035, Rockhampton Qld 4700 or email to secretary@achha.org.au.

ACHHA has purchased two manikins in keeping with our intention of replacing those not quite complete that have to date proved adequate, but in the discerning eyes of the school children are now somewhat lacking.

There remains a lot of work to be done in the archive area, such as cataloguing, sorting etc, and we would welcome any member able to join this activity or the roster for the school tours which will start shortly. No one will be left on their own, but we do not always get a lot of notice about tours, and Management Committee members are not always available.

The stone wall fence is still being worked on, and when complete, hopefully by September, we plan to hold a celebration function. The two Sandrock gates that once graced the fence around the Base Hospital will be a feature of the wall. In the wall or near the wall will be all the many interesting plaques that form part of the ACHHA collection. We are grateful to Dieter Irving who is working hard on ensuring the wall is completed before he leaves Rockhampton later in the year.

I wish our Archivist Yvonne a speedy return to full health and mobilisation, following surgery, and my continued appreciation goes to members of the Management Committee who so willingly ensure all is well at the Museum.

Norma West

As mentioned by our President in her report, we are mindful of keeping the museum display interesting for returning visitors. One of our Management Committee Members, Ashley Reid, has drawn up a draft program for the year. The first small display highlighted tuberculosis and drew attention to items in our Collection particularly the Westwood Sanatorium collection. As Norma mentioned, the second was a set of photographs with text setting out the story of the development of our museum at the Village including the transfer of the building from Mt Morgan and the work which has been done to refurbish it and set up the displays.

The next display, being set up in time for Anzac Day and the May Markets on May 13th features "Nurses in War Service". The intention of these displays is to highlight items in our collection, while placing them in the broader context of what it was like to be a health professional in country Australia or in the world at large in the first half of the 20th Century. With this in mind we will feature aspects of the life and service of two World War 1 nurses, Lillian Craib who trained in Charters Towers, and Martha Homewood who trained in Mt Morgan, and two World War 2 nurses, Alma Crudgington and Edna Weber, both of whom trained at the Rockhampton Hospital. Some aspects of Martha Homewoods's career will be featured in this Newsletter. We will also tell the full story of Edna Weber's career, of which service in the RAAF was just a part. Edna was an important donor to our collection. Apart from her story, delivered in the form of oral history interviews with Yvonne Kelley, we have a collection of valuable photographs and other items such as her uniform hat, badges of rank and service medals.

Some of our changing displays will be timed to link to broader community issues such as infection prevention, national reconciliation and poliomyelitis. Christmas celebrations were a highlight for the nurses and patients when stays in hospital were often much longer than they are today. We have many photographs of such celebrations in the collection. It was normal for these to be given prominence in the newspapers of the day – hence we often have a story to go with them. We are planning to feature Christmas in Hospitals at the time of the Christmas Markets on Sunday 25th November.

We hope you will be able to join us to view some of these special features, prepared to complement our permanent displays representing a typical country hospital.

Another beautiful photograph

This is an image of yet another of the large photographs in our Collection. One thing special about this one is that all of the names are available. The photograph taken around 1930 shows Matron Maud Green with midwifery staff near the time when the Women's Hospital in West St closed and the Lady Goodwin opened. The nurses are identified as (Back L to R): Eastern, Cameron, Towers, Green; (Front L to R): Yorke, Collins, Matron Sarah Maud Green, Fullerton, Weber and Tot Healy (seated on ground).

Remember that you can view more of our photographs in larger sizes on our website www.achha.org.au.



Association Membership

The Association welcomes your support for our activities. The Association operates on a normal financial year (July—June) and any new subscriptions paid now will be credited against the membership fee for the 2012/2013 Financial Year.

If you wish to join the Association, please contact the secretary, Errol Payne, by phone on 4922 3314, by email at:

secretary@achha.org.au or post payments to ACHHA Inc, Box 4035, Rockhampton Qld 4700. Of course any member of our management committee outlined on the final page will be pleased to assist you to join.

Membership Fees

Annual	
Individual	\$20.00
Couple	\$30.00
Life	
Individual	\$200.00
Couple	\$300.00
Please make cheques payable to: Australian Country	
Hospital Heritage Association Inc.	

Edna May Weber – A Career in Nursing 1925 - 1947

One of the essential parts of the ACHHA Collection is the set of oral histories of doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health professionals collected through tape recorded interviews over nearly 20 years. These tell a fascinating story about what it was like to be a health professional in country Queensland in the first 60 or so years of the 20th Century.

We have previously published the text of an oral history interview which Dr Tom Dewar collected by interviewing Dr Mervyn Gold, former specialist dermatologist and Medical Superintendent of the Rockhampton Hospital from 1946 to 1950. That interview was short enough to publish in full. In this Newsletter we will summarise the varied career of a nurse, Sister Edna May Weber (married name Besch). The interviews conducted by our Archivist, Mrs Yvonne Kelley, in the mid-1990's when Edna was 89 or 90 years of age run to 2 hours 50 minutes. They are fascinating to listen to, but much too long to print in full. Consequently we will summarise her story using the interview material, supplemented with additional recollections which Yvonne Kelley prepared for an International Women's Day address in 2002. The latter includes interesting additional information which emerged from discussions between Edna and Yvonne. The story includes some actual dates and details from other sources plus photographs, some of which were donated by Edna.

Edna Weber was born on 22 July 1905 in a private nursing home in North Rockhampton. Her mother died from meningitis on 25 May 2010 before she was five. She lived with various relatives in Rockhampton until she was 10 years of age when she was sent to the Rockhampton State Orphanage. She was fostered out for three years at 14 years of age and went back to the orphanage as a staff member doing general housework. Edna's cousins obtained a position for her as "lady's help" with Mr and Mrs Walter Buzacott. Mr W S Buzacott was editor of the Rockhampton Evening News. Mr and Mrs Buzacott were supporters of the Rockhampton Hospital. Edna remembered the Buzacott family as "a loving, compassionate church-minded family who often entertained nurses from the hospital". In this environment, Edna developed an interest in nursing and commenced her nursing career at the Rockhampton Hospital in 1925. Matron Jones was in charge of the hospital when she commenced, and she was very supportive. Dr James Bruce Gordon was the Medical Superintendent.

The uniform at the time was royal blue with a white apron and a cap and collar. Uniforms, which were heavily starched, were taken care of by the hospital laundry. Skirts were worn below the knee. The Matron gave lectures on hospital responsibilities and ethics, the medical superintendent taught anatomy and physiology and other Sisters also contributed to the lecture program. Disciplines taught and examined over the four year program included general nursing, anatomy, physiology, medical nursing and invalid cookery (generally taught in the technical colleges). Edna described the food in the nurses' home as being of quite good quality but limited in quantity. Late comers often missed out on chops or sausages! Edna completed her training in 1929.



Edna was very unwell when she finished her training. On her final day she was sent to meet with the Medical Superintendent Dr Gordon who had just finished telling her that she had been appointed Sister at the Hospital when she collapsed. She was in hospital for several weeks without a clear diagnosis of her illness. Edna decided it was time to leave and says that she managed to fake her temperature by breathing in cool air and she was discharged to the Emu Park Convalescent Home where she recovered. Years later her private doctor who had taken X-rays said that she had suffered from hepatitis at some time when she was younger.

Edna also commented that at the time that she finished her training in 1929 and became ill, the Children's Hospital had just been transferred to the Rockhampton Hospital. When Edna was sufficiently recovered to return to work, her position at the Rockhampton Hospital was still available and she worked there as a Sister for about four months.

At this stage, Edna's application to complete a midwifery qualification at the Rockhampton Women's Hospital in West Street was accepted by the Matron, Miss Maud Green. The completion of this six months course coincided with the closure of the Women's Hospital and the opening of the new maternity block (later the Lady Goodwin Hospital) on the present Rockhampton Hospital site facing North Street. (This was opened in September 1930 and the first babies were born there on 09 October 1930.)

Edna refers several times to the fact that it was difficult to find work in the 1930's because of the Great Depression. However, she was fortunate to be highly regarded by Dr Paul Voss of the Hillcrest Hospital who hired her for about three months as a carer and nanny to assist his wife, Dr Harriette Voss, to care for their new son, Vivian, who was born in late 1930. Time was spent both at the Voss residence, Penmaen in Bolsover Street, and at their beach property, Securis, on the coast just north of Emu Park.

Edna tells of their encounter with a cyclone which passed close to the coast in late January, early February 1931. Her custom was to take the baby for a walk in his pram each afternoon. As the strength of the wind increased, she had to call on Dr Voss for assistance to get the pram back to the house. The waves were so high that they came over the cliffs and into the house. The Chauffeur had to tie the car to a post to stop it from being washed away! The family was forced to evacuate, first to Yeppoon and then to Penmaen.

When the period as a Nanny for the Voss family was completed, Edna was employed for a time at the Hillcrest Private Hospital. However, she finished up losing this job because of the shortage of funds during the Depression. However, Dr Voss continued to regard her highly and found her another private nursing appointment caring for a very ill boy for about three weeks.

In about 1932 she met the Superintendent of the Westwood Sanatorium, Miss May Scully, who invited her to accept a position there as part of the small staff caring for tuberculosis patients. Edna says that her time at Westwood was quite enjoyable, though very strenuous and emotionally draining because tuberculosis at that time was a fatal disease. Effective treatments were not available until after World War 2. Westwood was serviced by its own railway siding, Huxham. Passengers and goods were ferried between the station and the Sanatorium with horse and buggy. Mr Dixon was the driver in the photograph below. It was possible to travel to Rockhampton during time off if desired.



This photograph donated by Edna shows the staff in the early 1930s. Back row (L-R) Nr Balem, Nr College, Sr Weber, Matron May Scully, Sr Gross, Nr Birk, Unidentified; Front row: Nr Studdard, Unidentified. (Incidentally, the Superintendent from 1923 to 1935, Miss May Scully, had served in the Australian Army Nursing Service in World War 1.)



Edna continued working at Westwood until early 1936. She says that she was keen to return to "normal" hospital nursing and applied for a relieving nurse position at Muttaburra (advertised in The Morning Bulletin on 15th and 18th January 1936). She soon travelled to Longreach by train from Rockhampton but had to wait in Longreach because the Thomson River was in flood. She had not taken enough money with her to meet the extra expenses caused by the delay and had to call for assistance from her family in Rockhampton. When the river went down far enough, she set off for Muttaburra through the mud with the mailman on his Ford truck. The journey of 70 miles took 11 hours. She arrived somewhat dishevelled into a "medical emergency" with the Matron meeting her with "Come on Sister, I want your help, quick". The Doctor had just

completed an operation on a patient with a perforated bowel caused by typhoid fever. Edna helped to nurse him but was devastated when told that she had to give her by now "very used" new winter suit to the Wardsman to burn.

Within a month of her arrival, the then Matron resigned and the Hospital Board appointed Edna as Matron on 24 February 1936. She remained there until mid-July 1940, working with Dr Joe Arratta for the whole time. From newspaper reports of the time, and speeches given at her two farewell functions, she was a pivotal figure in the community and very highly regarded. She was given a wallet of notes at each farewell.

The reason for leaving Muttaburra was that she wanted to enlist in the armed services to help the nation's effort in World War 2. Her first attempt to join the Army Nursing Service was unsuccessful because the Matron responsible for recruiting considered that her role in the remote hospital was more important than serving in the AANS. She next applied to join the RAAF Nursing Service and this time her application was successful. There was still a significant delay between being accepted and being called for service. During the interim period she worked for three months at Matron Chapman's Private Hospital in Brisbane.

Finally, her enlistment was formalised on 17 April 1941 when she was called to Sydney for an interview at Woolloomooloo. She was given a list of the clothing and uniform items which she was required to purchase from Farmer's Department Store before travelling to the Richmond Air Force Base in Sydney for vaccinations, basic orientation and induction into air-force nursing.

There was a slight problem on the first day when she and her companion took so long being served at Farmers that they missed the train to Richmond. Special transport had to be sent to collect them and the kitchen had to be kept open to feed them when they finally arrived. Needless to say, Matron was not impressed!

Edna was next sent to Amberley for more comprehensive service training. The hospital at Amberley was very up to date. However, she acquired dengue fever while there. Her next posting was to Garbutt Air Force Base in Townsville where she was in charge of nursing. There was also a very bad outbreak of dengue fever there at the time.

The original nurses' quarters were in a private home on Castle Hill before another home was found at Aitkenvale, closer to the base. Edna was in Townsville when it was bombed by the Japanese in late July 1942.

Her next posting was to New Guinea. She was one of the six nurses sent there at that time who were featured in a photograph published in the Australian Women's Weekly on 13th March 1943. Edna is on the left of the photograph.





This posting was to the 3 Medical Receiving Station (3MRS) near Port Moresby. Edna says there were no seats on the transport plane from Townsville to Port Moresby so they sat on their kit bags. The facilities at their new base were very simple. They lived in tents, with straw-filled palliasses on wire stretcher frames for beds. Conditions were often very muddy. The showers were in a hessian enclosure.

Edna was in New Guinea during major Japanese air assaults on Ward Air Strip which was a very major base for the forces of several countries. Many Australian planes were destroyed in one major strike because it was at first thought that the incoming enemy planes were returning allied reconnaissance planes. She speaks of one raid by 60 Japanese bombers and 120 fighters. The major casualties were a number of black American soldiers, killed because they were too close to a fuel dump which exploded during the bombing.

Edna speaks of one notable event during her time in New Guinea when she was responsible for the treatment of John Gorton after he crashed his Kittyhawk into the sea on take-off at Milne Bay on 08 March 1943. Mr Gorton, later Sir John Gorton, Australian Prime Minister, was very badly burnt on his chest and face. Treatments at the time included a salt bath and coating of the burns with Balsam of Peru and Vaseline. They were then wrapped with layers of gauze bandages which were kept moist at all times. After about two days, Mr Gorton was evacuated to the mainland.

From New Guinea she was sent to Bradfield Park in Sydney where she was responsible for the theatre, then to Evans Head, a pilot training unit on the NSW Coast where she was in charge of the air force unit. Next came Daws Road in Adelaide, an army hospital with air-force unit attached, where she was in charge for a couple of years, then the large Brisbane hospital at Greenslopes. Her final posting was to Heidelberg in Victoria. This was a very big project with many air force wards and plenty of staff. Matron McRae was in charge, Edna was second in charge. This hospital received many very ill patients who had been very badly ill-treated as Prisoners of War on the Burma trails. (Matron C J McRae went on to become the Principal Matron for the RAAF in the 1950's).

This photograph shows the nursing staff at Heidelberg in about 1947. Edna is sixth from the left in the front row, and Matron McRae is eighth from the left.



With the senior positions which Edna held in these hospitals in Australia and had a commissioned appointment equivalent to Flight Lieutenant. However, nurses were always addressed with the title "Sister". Her rank at discharge was formally specified as Senior Sister.

Edna was discharged from Heidelberg on compassionate grounds on 06 May 1947. Her maternal Great Aunt was seriously ill and the family applied pressure for her to come home and nurse her, which she did for 15 months without remuneration. By then she had met her future husband, Mr Paul Besch whom she married in 1948. Henceforth she lived on and managed a family property "Six Mile Vale" at Upper Ulam about 50 km south of Rockhampton where she greatly enjoyed her life on a farm in a quiet rural community. Paul died in 1984, but she continued to manage the property, riding her horse and helping muster cattle until 1993 when she was 88 years old.

Yvonne remembers Edna as one of the beautiful people, beautiful from within. She was a quietly spoken gracious lady, loved by all who knew her. Yvonne met Edna through a mutual friend, Kit Walters, after Paul's death and feels privileged that Edna shared so much of her experiences with her, and donated her story and so many photographs and wartime keepsakes to the Hospital Museum.

Martha Homewood – a Country Hospital Nurse in World War 1

While preparing for our Anzac Day display, "Nurses in War Service", one of the nurses who came to our attention was Martha Homewood, a country hospital nurse who trained at the Mt Morgan Hospital. We have a photograph of Martha in our collection, but what particularly attracted our attention was that Martha wrote letters to her family from France while she was serving there, and these were published in the Morning Bulletin and the Capricornian newspapers, giving an idea of how our nurses saw their situation in difficult and dangerous circumstances far from home.

Another fact that strikes us is that the Homewood family is an example of what seems to have been a relatively common occurrence in the large families typical of the early part of the 20th Century. Several sibling sisters would take up nursing as a career.

When Martha's mother died in the isolation ward of the Mount Morgan Hospital in June 1919, part of the report in The Morning Bulletin read (1) "Mrs Homewood is survived by her husband, eight daughters, five sons, a sister (Mrs. J. Ward, Melbourne), and a brother (Mr. J. Burns). Of her daughters, five are nurses - Nurses Mat and Grace Homewood being with the Australian Imperial Forces, Miss Nell Homewood, Matron of the Base Influenza Hospital, Melbourne, and Miss Janet Homewood at the General Hospital, Rockhampton, and Miss Margaret Homewood, who is married to Mr. F. S. Cunningham, Mount Morgan." There were still two daughters at home, and it appears from a Rupert Goodman's research, that these also became nurses. (2) Back to Martha herself, this is her photograph from our Country Hospital Museum Collection.



According to her war service record (3), Martha enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service 13th

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Australian General Hospital at Enoggera, Brisbane, on 10th April 1916. The Australian War Memorial has this photograph of Martha with her colleagues at Enoggera in 1916.(4)



The photograph includes Back Row (L to R): Staff Nurses Sarah Cairns, Phillips, Catherine Reid Black, Cave, Caroline Rose Griffith, Annie Isabel Warner, Janet Barron, Burt, Gertrude May Skyring, Martha May Homewood; Front row: Staff Nurses Rowe, Bryden, Sister Florence Lynch, Matron Emily Anne Ralston, Sister Goodman, Staff Nurses Lawson and Edith Mary Toft. Edith Toft also trained at the Rockhampton Hospital.

Martha embarked from Sydney on the "Thermistocles" on 29th December 1916 and disembarked in Plymouth on 3rd March 1917. She was posted to the 12th Stationary Hospital at Rouen, France, where she commenced duty on 13th March. During the following two years she served at several British and Australian war hospitals in France. She was promoted from Staff Nurse to Sister in December 1918. She returned to England on 4th March 1919 after the war had ended.

However, she did not proceed home immediately. In what would surely have been unusual at the time, she was granted leave on full pay with a subsistence allowance for about 10 weeks to attend a course at the Mansions Motor Training Garage in London.

We can only imagine her feelings when she heard that her mother had died just before the end of the course and before her return to Australia on 22nd September 1919.

As mentioned in the introduction, Martha wrote home regularly. Unfortunately, these letters are too long to print in full, though you can find them on Trove at the links provided at the end of the Newsletter. A couple of excerpts are reproduced here so that you can have some idea of her stories. Letter 1 - mid-1917 published 03 Aug 1917 (5) "Here I am, like the poor boys, somewhere in France. I have been here a week and have tried several times to write home, but have failed each time.

All our happy little band has been separated and distributed to all parts. Sister Barrow and I are still together and roughing it. Roughing it is not in it, as this place is one mass of mud (knee deep), and it has never done raining and snowing. It is such funny snow. When it hits your face and dress it freezes into ice, and one collects quite an amount while going around. All the sides and the tops of the tents are frozen, this condition lasting all day. For a change it starts blowing very hard, and the tents come down with no respect for anyone that is under them. Our first experience was when Sister Barrow and I were in a dispensing tent for talk. The whole lot came down, and we were buried under the debris. We scrambled out.

We are not in Australian quarters, therefore I never see any Australians.

We arrived at our destination at about twelve o'clock at night. It was raining, and not a soul could understand us. However, after a while, a soldier came along and was only too glad to have a chat in English with us. He gave us instructions where to go. When we reached our tents we had to rig up our beds and unpack our kits to get some grey blankets that we received in London. But they made no difference, as the cold was penetrating. We were also supplied with a kerosene lamp to warm up the tent. After no end of Queensland language we got into bed about three o'clock and were out again at half-past six o'clock. However this is not quite so bad as the time that the poor boys have in the trenches. We also brought our own washing dish and bucket, all made of green canvas, and the dye comes out of them. Still, they answer the purpose.

Our uniform consists of big rubber gum boots, sou'wester hats, and mackintosh coats. The place is one mass of tents and poor sick men."

Letter 2 - 02 Sep 1918 published 22 Nov 1918 (6) "We are kept moving to such an extent that one is never settled for long in the same place. We are back on our old land again. Jerry must feel disappointed with himself at losing it again. The villages and towns are smashed to pieces. Not a standing roof remains. The cathedrals are in a deplorable state, and their beautiful statues are in ruins. I am sure the French folk must he heartbroken about it all. It is getting cold again here. It seems to be no time since we had snow. I can see another winter staring us in the face, but I think that it will be the last.

I had my first experience a few days ago in an Australian hospital since being on active service. I like the methods on which they are run, and the boys have every comfort that it is possible to give them. It is quite different being in a colonial hospital. The discipline in the British Expeditionary Force is very strict indeed. The orderlies in our hospital are the dearest of boys. They make you a cup of tea and bring it along at night and all sorts of things. They are so different to the orderlies that I have been used to for the past two years. The Australians come along, and the first thing they say is 'Sister, what state are you from?' and they like a few words of conversation.

I am on night duty. The nights are very short. We are admitting and evacuating continuously.

I get on very well with the English, especially the medical officers. They are very gentlemanly and very nice to work with. I have a good deal to do with the American medical officers. They are very clever, and they have such beautiful instrumental outfits."

Letter 3 – 03 Nov 1918 published 01 Feb 1919 (7)

(Martha had been ill and had been sent to recuperate. This was written just before Armistice Day).

"I was just delighted to get my lovely big home mail.

I am feeling well again and am spending my leave

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Elected Office Bearers

President:Norma WestSecretary:Errol PayneTreasurer:Kay Smith

Archivist: Yvonne Kelley

in Cannes, Monte Carlo, and Nice. You would be surprised at the old blue gum and wattle that are growing down here. There are heaps of oranges, grapes, loquats, and various tropical fruits.

I think it would be dreadful not to see all these wonderful cities whilst I am here. A Canadian sister and myself are travelling together. We get on awfully well with the American sisters, and I love the Canadian girls as they are so bonny and bright.

We have got 'Fritz ' mastered now, whilst the Turks are right out of it."

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Committee Members

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