



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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A quarterly periodical dedicated to the history and culture of Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, USA

Centennial Celebration at Eastern Mennonite, 1917-2017

In this issue we recognize a hundred years since Eastern Mennonite School first opened in the fall of 1917. This year EMU and EMS celebrate together during a joint Centennial Homecoming, October 12-15, 2017. We include stories and photos to both review and evaluate the meaning of a hundred years for Eastern Mennonite.

Please mark **November 11, 2017, 9:30 AM**, on your calendar for the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians Annual Meeting, at Village Hall at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community.

Timothy and Ruth Jost will talk about

their Mennonite Heritage tour to Poland in 2015. The Josts visited cities and villages where Timothy's ancestors lived for 200 years from the 16th to 18th century, including seeing the oldest Mennonite church building in the world.



Bible class at Eastern Mennonite School, early 1940s, with Ada M. Zimmerman, Dean of Women, speaking
Photo from Mildred Slagell Collection, EMHS Class of 1943



Eastern Mennonite School Sign, 2012

Photo from Leona Good and Rebekah Hertzler, EMHS Class of 2012

Eastern Mennonite University Sign

Photo by Editor 2017

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One Amidst Many

by Elwood E. Yoder

In August 2016, a youth minister in a Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Church dropped off a packet of old photos for me at Eastern Mennonite High School. She didn't know who else to give the photos to and figured I may know what to do with them, especially with the upcoming Centennial celebration. For a number of months, the packet lay on my desk where it landed, virtually untouched.

During the spring of 2017, I asked an honors student to take a look at the packet of photos and scan the ones that seemed clear and useful. My senior student did that and gave them to me on a USB flash drive. Then, finally, in late July 2017, I had time to look at the black and white photos on my computer. I reread what the youth minister had written about the photos on the large manila packet with prints that landed on my desk, looked at the name of the high school grad whose photos they had been, and began to investigate.

When I finally got to the EMS Yearbook for 1943, I found a photo of Mildred Slagell, the source of the photos. Mildred (1921-2013) came to Harrisonburg from Oklahoma in the early 1940s, during World War II, and attended EMS for two years. Three years after she passed away in Oklahoma in 2013, without any children, the Harrisonburg youth minister, a distant relative, dropped off Mildred's treasure photos to me. When I began to apply Adobe Photoshop to the old prints, the life of Mildred Slagell at EMS in the early 1940s popped into life.

While I can describe in detail six Mennonite families that have sent five generations to EMHS, and I can name several more families with four generations in the

school system, Mildred appears to have been the only one from her distant Oklahoma family to attend EMS. Mildred Slagell is one amidst many, like hundreds of other EMS students.

Mildred's twenty-nine photos that were worthy of scanning and photo editing are gems. Many people take photos, some organize and label them, but only a very few can locate their photos when they or the occasional historian needs them. Mildred kept her EMS photos for seventy years before they made a circuitous route into my Harrisonburg classroom, several years after her passing to glory.

I read the comments in the 1943 EMS Yearbook about Mildred Slagell. She was a good singer and traveled many miles by train from Oklahoma to attend high school. Her on-line obituary reveals that she never got married, and that her career was a professional secretary. She was a lifetime member of a Mennonite Church, and taught Sunday school for years. We know Mildred's roommate at EMS, Wanda Weber, because Mildred labeled the back of Wanda's photo. Wanda and Mildred's senior photos are similar, though with different hairstyles, dress styles, and Wanda didn't wear covering strings. In this issue we are featuring some of Mildred Slagell's unique photos, with a few that I had not seen before, while other photos are the stock mid-twentieth century group photos that many students kept in albums or shoe boxes.

Many hundreds of students like Mildred Slagell have graced the halls of Eastern Mennonite School in the past 100 years. Some EMS students lived well-known and public lives and their record can easily be found in print and the internet. Others, like Mildred, take a bit of effort to uncover something about them. Whether from a five generation family

that has attended EMS for a hundred years, or ones like Mildred who may have been the only one from their family to attend, all this is what has made the strong character and interwoven fabric of Eastern Mennonite School.

Just a few years after Mildred Slagell graduated from EMS, a young man from Kempsville, Virginia, desperately desired to further his education. Elmer S. Yoder wanted to attend EMS, but his Beachy Amish community in the Tidewater region frowned on such higher educational pursuits. The best that Elmer Yoder could do was attend one summer school session in 1950, and he is pictured in the yearbook, looking up from the back of the large summer group, eager and glad to be attending EMS.

Years later, after Elmer earned a Master's degree in Ohio, and served on the EMU Board, Elmer's two sons attended Eastern Mennonite College and both graduated. Both of Elmer's sons also attended Eastern Mennonite Seminary, and both men are active in the church. Not too long after graduating from EMC, one of Elmer's sons was fortunate enough to land a job at EMHS, and is now in his thirtieth year of teaching history and Bible.

During this Centennial, while Elmer Yoder's son helps to interpret the story of the school in a variety of ways, the stories of Mildred Slagell and Elmer S. Yoder keep coming to memory. These were individuals who came to classes, some for a year or two, others for only a summer session. They are one amidst many, who came from a distance, and they are what has made EMS unique.

Private schools are a function of the students who attend, the teachers who work in the classrooms, and administrators who raise money and pay the bills. It is the individual student that makes a difference at Eastern Mennonite School. EMS has always been small

enough such that the individual does not get lost.

Mildred Slagell watched Lehman auditorium being built while she attended classes. Mildred and her friends relaxed occasionally at nearby Sparkling Springs, a retreat get-away spot for Mennonites near EMS. Mildred had fun with her friends and went on hikes, outings, and sang in a women's quartet. Mildred tried out roller skates on what appears to be Mt. Clinton Pike, she has a photo of EMS boys making a huge human pyramid, and Mildred was part of the Philomathean Literary Society at EMS.

Mildred's story may not be all that unique as there are hundreds of similar student stories. But it is young women like Mildred who have made Eastern Mennonite School what it has become at the Centennial. In a Valley community with enough Mennonite families in the early years to support the school, and now in recent years, with other families from many other denominations and locations attending, Eastern Mennonite School is poised to enter the second century as a healthy, vibrant, and Christ-centered institution.

The Founders a century ago wanted a church school that offered Bible instruction, included academic courses, produced good music, and taught practical living skills. From her photo packet, returned to Virginia after a seven-decade sojourn in Oklahoma, we catch a glimpse into Mildred's school years and see that those objectives were carried out.

Many thanks to our readers and the host of families, both in Virginia and beyond, who have supported EMS over the years. As this Editor teaches history and Bible in the 100th year of the school, he will keep in mind the singular stories of Mildred Slagell and Elmer S. Yoder, and look for such students in his classroom at EMHS today.

Four Generations at Eastern Mennonite School

by Lois (Burkholder) Bowman

In 1921 Ernest G. Gehman, faculty member at the young EMS, persuaded his Souderton, Pennsylvania neighbor, Eva C. Moyer, to enroll at EMS that fall. Eva enrolled in the two-year high school Bible program, finishing in Spring, 1923. At that point, she stayed out to be with her widowed mother, while her younger sister, Bessie, went to school for a year. Bessie graduated from EMS in 1930. Eva returned to EMS in the fall of 1924 and graduated with a four-year high school diploma in 1926.

It was at EMS that Eva met Marion D. Burkholder, a Harrisonburg farm boy. On June 2, 1927, they were married and settled in Prince Georges County, Md., where Marion worked as a carpenter for a Mennonite contractor.

Marion and Eva raised a family of three children, Ruth, David, and Lois. When Ruth, the oldest, was twelve years old, about one month shy of her thirteenth birthday, they brought her to EMS for high school. She graduated in 1945. When David and Lois were approaching high school age, the family moved to Park View in the summer of 1948. The three children currently all live in Virginia. David graduated from high school in 1952, and Lois in 1953. Because Virginia didn't yet have 8th grade (and Maryland did), Lois gained a year on David, who is two years older.

As time went by, Lois married Wade M. Bowman. Their daughter, Wanda, attended EMHS, beginning in 8th grade, and graduated in 1982.

More time went by, and Wanda married

Phil Harder. Their son, Joseph, graduated (now called EMS again) in 2016, and their daughter, Grace, is a rising junior at EMHS. Will there someday be a 5th generation of our family at Eastern Mennonite School?

Although Eva never attended college, Ruth, David, Lois and Wanda all graduated from college at EMC/EMU, and Joseph is a rising sophomore there. David's oldest son, Wesley, graduated from EMU's Adult Degree Completion program in 2004, after starting at Blue Ridge Community College.



Lois Bowman worked in the EMU Hartzler Library for 51 years, 1963-2014. She is a distinguished authority on Mennonite history, life, and genealogy in Virginia and beyond. Lois serves on the Executive Committee of the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians and continues to volunteer in the Menno Simons Historical Library.

Photo from EMU Archives

The Kauffman Museum of Bethel College has created a traveling exhibit entitled "Voices of Conscience: Peace Witness in the Great War." EMU will be hosting the exhibit in the fall of 2018. At a time when our churches are arguably as poorly prepared as we have been at any time since World War I for war fever to sweep our country, this will be an opportunity to reflect on the lessons of history. Anyone who is willing to make a contribution to EMU to bring the exhibit here should contact Timothy Jost, at jostt@wlu.edu.

A Brief History of Eastern Mennonite School

1917	Purchase of Assembly Park, Harrisonburg, Virginia, for EMS - first classes met fall, 1917
1920	EMS moved into new building on a hill in Park View, Va.
1921	High School accredited by state of Virginia
1926	South wing of Administration Building added
1930	Junior College added
1932	Teacher training program added
1941	North wing added to Administration Building
1943	Chapel Auditorium built
1947	State accreditation for senior college program - name changed to Eastern Mennonite College
1949	Northlawn residence hall built
1956	High School was accredited by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
1964	High School building completed
1972	Fine arts building added to EMHS
1976	Gym built at EMHS
1982	Charter for independent school established EMHS, which created a separate Board
1983	Seventh grade added to EMHS
1987	Dining Hall and Industrial Arts facilities added to EMHS
1994	Eastern Mennonite College name changed to Eastern Mennonite University
1995	Sixth grade added to EMHS
2002	EMHS is accredited by Virginia Association of Independent Schools (VAIS)
2005	Eastern Mennonite Elementary School is added
2006	Eastern Mennonite School name used again, which includes EMHS, EMMS, and EMES
2013	EMS accredited by Mennonite Education Agency
2017	EMS purchase of Menno Media building for future site of Elementary School
2017	EMS and EMU Centennial Celebration

Profound Nurture and Growth

by David Lapp Jost, EMHS Class of 2008

EMS has been a place of profound nurture and growth in my family. Between my grandparents, my parents' generation, my generation, spouses, and our kids, we've cumulatively studied about 110 years at EMS. My family's long history at Eastern Mennonite School began when my grandma and grandpa, Ruth Brunk and Grant Stoltzfus, met there as students. They married shortly after finishing their programs, and remained deeply engaged in the EMC/EMU/EMHS worlds for the rest of their lives. All five of their children attended EMS for high school, and most have remained deeply engaged in Mennonite churches and supportive of EMS for their whole lives.

In my generation, EMS' influence runs broad and deep. Of myself and my twelve cousins, eleven attended EMHS, most of us for four years. My dear and late cousin Reuben was mischievous, and I'm told many EMHS rules were written in response to his escapades. I'm also told that the tradition of artful senior pranks took its place in EMHS lore thanks to the antics of my cousins Peter and Nathaniel. My brothers and cousins were mostly boys, but the leaders of the pack were Laura and Katie. Laura pioneered participating in touring choir, an example which many of the rest of the boys in our generation followed. Katie led the way in nurturing a family culture of critical thinking and in attending Goshen College, where most of the rest of us would also go after our time at EMHS.

Touring Choir has been at the heart of my generation's experience of EMS. As a child, I remember overhearing my cousin Nathaniel remarking that Touring Choir is the reason to go to EMS. Plenty in my family have found other reasons to love EMS, but the impact of

the singing tradition on our shared culture, faith life, and sense of identity has been profound. For those of us in choir, the trips to Europe, the friendships with fellow students, and the pleasure of working with Jay Hartzler were all integral to the experience at EMS. We still love to sing together, and regularly do so. Jay made such an impression on many of us, and our musical abilities.

EMHS is a central part of who we are. It has enriched us. It has nurtured us. As a family, it has helped cement us together, and helped cement us to this beautiful Shenandoah Valley and this beautiful Mennonite denomination that we together call home.

Who were the EMS Founders?

by Elwood Yoder

For purposes of this essay, the Eastern Mennonite School "founders" worked diligently for the success of the school in the early years, and they fully believed in the mission of the school.

Two persons who early on advocated a school in the eastern United States were Amos D. Wenger, evangelist of Lancaster Conference, and Menno S. Steiner, Ohio missions leader. Those who circulated a petition to start a school in Denbigh, Va., were George R. Brunk I, John M. Shank, Adam Baer, and Daniel Shenk. Lewis J. Heatwole was brought in on the planning. Brunk brought a load of sand to the site and said, "Whoever writes the history of this school can say that George R. Brunk hauled the first load of sand for it." When that fell through, Brunk proposed a site in Alexandria, Va. Lewis J. Heatwole, Daniel Kauffman, and Adam Baer investigated that possibility.

When that experiment ended, Lewis J. Heatwole and George R. Brunk I pushed

for Assembly Park in Harrisonburg, Va.

With them were *Gospel Herald* Editor Daniel Kauffman, Lindale Deacon John J. Wenger, Bishop David Garber, Evangelist Edward J. Berkey, Denbigh public school teacher and minister Daniel Shenk, fund raiser John M. Shank, Shenandoah Valley lay leader and fund raiser Peter S. Hartman, Minister William W. Hege, and Minister Amos D. Wenger.

During a baccalaureate sermon in 1926, George R. Brunk I stated: "Under God, here shall arise a temple of learning which shall widely bless the Church, and produce a type of men and women that can hold the Gospel ground against the world."¹

Once the decision to bring the new Mennonite school to Harrisonburg was made, Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole was a key leader in making the school happen. Heatwole and

first president.

Christian H. Brunk, from the Weavers Mennonite Church, suggested the name Eastern Mennonite School, which was used to name the new school.

Jacob B. Smith served as the school's first President, 1917-1922. An excellent Biblical scholar, Smith helped establish a solid academic direction for the school. Evangelist Amos D. Wenger, the school's second President, 1922-1935, guided the school through its first and second decades.

In the early years, a group of key faculty leaders taught at the new school and established its academic program. Sadie A. Hartzler served the school as librarian from 1926-1962. History professor Harry A. Brunk served the school for years as a teacher in the first decades of the school and excelled as a

writer of Mennonite history. Chester K. Lehman was Dean of Eastern Mennonite College and Seminary from 1923-1956, and taught many students theology and Scripture.

It can hardly be overstated the commitment of Virginia Mennonite congregations in helping to establish the school in the early twentieth century. Churches from across the Virginia Mennonite Conference contributed funds and sent their students to school. Soon students from across the eastern United States

began driving to EMS for studies. Eastern Mennonite School was established as a church school and remains so today.

All praise be to God!



Eastern Mennonite School Faculty about 1943.

Photo from Mildred Slagell Collection

Peter S. Hartman raised \$14,500 to buy Assembly Park, with twenty-three acres, a large tabernacle, and other buildings. When the school opened in October, 1917, Bishop Heatwole served as chairman of the Board. He was asked, but declined to serve as the school's

1. Dr. Gerald Brunk contributed the second, third, and paragraphs of this essay, which he drew from Hubert R. Pellman's book *Eastern Mennonite College, 1917-1967: A History*. Dr. Gerald Brunk is a grandson of George R. Brunk I, who was so influential in starting the school. Dr. Gerald Brunk serves on the Executive Committee of Shenandoah Mennonite Historians and taught history for many years at Eastern Mennonite College. Three of Gerald Brunk's grandchildren attend EMHS in 2017-18, and the oldest, Braden Brunk, is a senior and is a member of the 100th class at the school, a great-great-grandson of George R. Brunk I

L. J. Heatwole, The Educatin' Bishop

by Evan K. Knappenberger

In the 1880s during the Virginia Mennonite conflict over Sunday Schools, Abraham Blosser famously let loose on Bishop Sam Coffman, calling him “evil” and “idolatrous,” sealing his tirade against the good Bishop with the epithet “Twistifyin’!”¹ Blosser had real reasons to bemoan creeping modernisms: Virginia was, I have argued, on the progressive side of things, and the historic conflict in Mennonitism at that time revolved around education.² For example, Blosser ran his own conservative grammar school, printing press, and periodical, while Coffman’s son John led youth revivals and founded the institution which became Goshen College.³ Steering a middle course



Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole,

1852-1932

Photo VMC Archives

between these two camps was Lewis J. Heatwole, the man who oversaw the establishment of the Eastern Mennonite School and College. L. J. was from a long line of educators, including the first professional teacher in the area.⁴ He was a professional educator from a very young age, teaching in a one-room schoolhouse for hardly any pay. Soon, Heatwole received a Master’s degree from doing correspondence work – an honor which he concealed for most of his life. After being ordained as Bishop, Heatwole presided over the Old Order schism in the first

years of the new century. With the loss of the most conservative elements of the church, Heatwole was free to pursue new educational superstructures: a dream realized a decade later with the founding of Eastern Mennonite School, of which Heatwole was the first Trustee.

Besides being an educator and Bishop, Heatwole was a famed scientist, convicted as a felon for his pacifism, and had a hand in helping found what became Madison College.⁵ He rode a regular preaching circuit, chaired a local temperance union, and even invented a new calendrical system that was presented to the League of Nations – but for Eastern Mennonite, he marshalled all the resources at his disposal. Had Abe Blosser been around to see it, he no doubt would have labelled Heatwole as “the Educatin’ Bishop” – and nothing could be closer to the truth.

Evan K. Knappenberger is working on a Master’s thesis about L. J. Heatwole at Eastern Mennonite Seminary

Editor’s Note: A fifth generation descendant of Lewis (L. J.) and Mary Heatwole is a junior at Eastern Mennonite High School in 2017-2018.

Lewis J. Heatwole m. Mary Coffman
Bessie Heatwole m. Oscar Wenger
Mildred Wenger ’34 m. Marvin Plank
Kenneth Plank ’59 m. Eloise Thomas
Rebecca Plank m. Kerry Leichty

Grant Leichty, EMHS 2019 graduate, sibling to Evan ’17, Kathryn ’15, and Elliot Leichty ’14

1. Harry Anthony Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia* ([Harrisonburg, Va., 1959-[72], 1959). Chapter 10, (pp. 199 f.)

2. For example, Virginia saw the first English Mennonite preaching. John F. Funk, *An Address by John F. Funk on the Occasion of the Ninety-Second Anniversary of His Birth, at the Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind., April 6, 1927* (Elkhart, Ind.: 1927).

3. M.S. Steiner, Mennonite Book, and Tract Society, *John S. Coffman, Mennonite Evangelist: His Life and Labors* (Mennonite Book and Tract Society, 1903).

4. Cornelius J. Heatwole et al., *History of the Heatwole Family from the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century to the Present Time* (1907) (North Newton, Kan. : Mennonite Press, 1970. 2nd printing, 1970).

5. Lora Steiner, *L. J. Heatwole, Mennonite Renaissance Man* (2001., 2001).

How do we know the history of Eastern Mennonite?

by Elwood Yoder

It was with great delight that I discovered a digitized 1943 yearbook of EMS on the Hartzler Library website. In order to learn more about high school graduate Mildred Slagell, I had accessed the 1943 print yearbook at the EMHS front office. At the Centennial, however, Hartzler Library staff have forged into the digitized world and scanned yearbooks, the *Weather Vane*, and other items for the researcher to see, read, and study.

To know the history of Eastern Mennonite, one must begin with the various archives. Entryway is through the Menno Simons Historical Library, which then gains the researcher access to the EMU Archives and the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives. Simone Horst, Special Collections Librarian, directs traffic and helps the researcher find files, term papers, photos, and rare books. Simone also serves on the Historical Committee of the Virginia Mennonite Conference, where recent changes were made to bring the Conference Archives under the supervision of Simone's office.

Beyond the archives, a generous supply of secondary source books helps the researcher to know the story of Eastern Mennonite. Annual yearbooks are a great place to begin. Early 20th century History Professor Harry A. Brunk wrote books that include many details about the history of EMS. English Professor Hubert Pellman wrote a sturdy history of the first fifty years of the school, still the standard reference.

Other writers of note in discussing the historiography of Eastern Mennonite include former Library Director James O. Lehman, especially his book about Lindale Mennonite Church and articles he wrote while Editor of *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*. Glendon L. Blosser has written accounts of his own involvement in the life of EMHS and EMU, drawn from decades of commitment and service to both institutions, and his writings should

not be missed in accessing the EMS story. The growing list of Virginia Mennonite Conference congregational history books, displayed on one shelf in the VMC Archives, provides insight into the school from local congregations.

Personal collections often provide a treasure trove of details about the school. The files of James Rush, gathered during forty years of teaching history at EMHS, are invaluable as a source of information about the Park View community that surrounds and envelops the school. Miriam Wenger's photo collection of EMS, kept at her home in Augusta County, Va., is a great example of a personal EMS analog image repository.

A new generation of historians will certainly revise their interpretations of EMS and EMU history in the future. In order that the archives help to shape their historical understandings, it is this researcher's hope that the jewel of the EMU Hartzler Library, its archives and Historical Library, remains adequately funded by University administrators. With a coming quincentenary of the Mennonite Church, the archives housed in Sadie Hartzler's Library will be of growing importance not only for future historians, but also for a host of Mennonite denominations, churches, and individuals that will rely on the school's collections. Maintaining the school's archives seems to be something that Menno Simons himself, a writer and thinker in his own right, would appreciate.



Simone Horst, Special Collections Librarian, Hartzler Library, EMU

Photo by Editor



All photos from Mildred Slagell (1921-1913) collection, high school class of 1943. Twenty-nine photos from Mildred Slagell can be found at [flickr.com/photos/mennonitearchivesofvirginia/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/mennonitearchivesofvirginia/). Middle left, Mildred Slagell (left) and her roommate Wanda Weber. Upper photo, EMS Prayer Circle early 1940s, with Slagell and Weber far right; Left, Slagell and Weber and a friend roller-skating in Park View.



Left page middle, *Weather Vane* staff early 1940s, M. T. Brackbill advisor, with Slagell middle back typing; Administration Building about 1943; Women's EMS Quartet early 1940s, Mildred Slagell far left in photo (other women unidentified).





David Lapp Jost sent this photo along with his article that is included on page six. The photo shows David's recent marriage to Sophie Lapp. David said this is most of his Stoltzfus side of the family, with about 12 EMHS graduates, and as he said, "many future ones, surely, too."

Photo from David Lapp Jost

EMU Presidents

Jacob B. Smith, 1917-22
 Amos D. Wenger, 1922-35
 John L. Stauffer, 1935-48
 John R. Mumaw, 1948-65
 Myron S. Augsburg, 1965-80
 Richard C. Detweiler, 1980-87
 Joseph L. Lapp, 1987-2003
 Loren Swartzendruber, 2003-2016
 Susan Schultz Huxman, 2017-

EMS Administrators

Principal Jacob B. Smith, 1917-22
 Director D. Ralph Hostetter, 1938-57
 Director Harold D. Lehman, 1957-62
 Director Jesse T. Byler, 1962-64
 Director John H. Krall, 1964-69
 Principal Samuel O. Weaver, 1969-81
 Principal J. David Yoder, 1981-2003
 Head of School Paul G. Leaman, 2003-

If you have an idea for an article or picture for the *Historian*, contact the Editor at elyoder@gmail.com.

Past issues of the *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* can be found in PDF format at http://mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net/Shenandoah_Historian.html

An annual individual membership fee for the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians is \$10.00 per year, which includes a subscription to the *Historian*. Additional family memberships are \$5 each. Send membership fees or inquiries to James Rush, e-mail at jamesrush@comcast.net, phone 540-434-0792, or U.S. mail to James Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22802.

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