



JUNE 2025

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Follow us!



A Newsletter for the volunteers & friends of the Stephenson House



New Book Release Brings the Colonel—and Early Illinois History—to Life

Colonel Benjamin Stephenson & the History of Early Illinois

by Sidney G. Denny

Now Available in the Museum Shop – Order Online

We're thrilled to share exciting news with our friends and supporters: a long-awaited treasure has finally arrived at the Colonel Benjamin Stephenson House. After more than a year of anticipation, "Colonel Benjamin Stephenson & the History of Early Illinois", the final work of the late Sidney G. Denny, is now available in our museum shop—and it's already making waves among history lovers.

The journey to this book's publication is as rich as its contents. In early 2024, the museum's director uncovered a forgotten manuscript tucked among the papers of Sid Denny, a longtime board member of the Friends of the Colonel Benjamin Stephenson House who passed away in 2023. The manuscript compiled over a decade of Denny's articles originally written for *The Spectator*, the museum's newsletter. These articles—painstakingly researched and passionately written—shed light on the life of Colonel Stephenson, the early history of Edwardsville, and the broader story of Illinois's transformation from a rugged frontier into the twenty-first

state of the Union.

Now published for the first time, Denny's work offers more than just a biography of one of Illinois's founding figures. It's a vivid, deeply researched narrative that follows Colonel Benjamin Stephenson from his Pennsylvania roots in the late 18th century to his role in shaping the Illinois frontier. Readers will explore Stephenson's political leadership, his family life, and his enduring impact on

(Book, Continued on page 3)



Colonel Benjamin Stephenson

and the History of Early Illinois

Sidney G. Denny

Get Ready for the 2025 Sid Denny Memorial Antiques Online Auction!

Bidding Now Open • Closes July 16 at 6 PM

Auction Link: <https://legacysells4u.hibid.com/catalog/648165/stephenson-house-benefit-auction>

It's time to raise your virtual paddle! The 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House invites you to our annual **Sid Denny Memorial Antiques & Collectibles Online Auction**—a beloved tradition that celebrates the memory of longtime friend and supporter, Sid Denny.

Online Bidding Is Now Open

Find a new old treasure—bidding is now live with new items added every week! From vintage oddities to charming heirlooms, you never know what gem you'll find.

Local Pickup & Shipping Info

- **Pickup Day:** July 18 & 19
- **Time:** Fri: 5-8 pm., Sat: 8 am–12 pm
- **Location:** GEM Storage, 447 S. Buchanan St., Edwardsville, IL

Not local? No worries—shipping is available for out-of-town winners!

Want to Donate an Antique or Collectible?

We're currently accepting **antiques and collectibles** only for this special spring auction. If you've got a vintage treasure ready for a new home, give us a call to confirm your item or arrange a pickup:

- (618) 692-1818
- stephensonhouse1820@yahoo.com

Donations are tax-deductible and support our historic restoration projects and educational programs. Please note:

- **Modern items can't be accepted**
- **We no longer accept 50/50 donations** – all items become the property of the museum
- **Unsold items will not be returned**

Help preserve the past while scoring something special—**let the bidding (and donating!) begin!**



Voices of Freedom: The Free Black Community in 1820s Edwardsville

In the growing town of Edwardsville during the 1820s, nestled along the burgeoning edge of the American frontier, lived a quiet yet resilient group whose story is too often overlooked: the free Black residents of early Illinois. Though slavery was officially prohibited under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the reality in Illinois was far more complicated. Amid these contradictions, a small population of freed African Americans carved out lives of labor, skill, faith, and perseverance—right alongside prominent figures like Colonel Benjamin Stephenson.



the law sometimes allowed. Despite facing prejudice, legal restrictions, and the constant threat of kidnapping or re-enslavement, they found ways to contribute meaningfully to the fabric of the town.

Free Black men in Edwardsville often worked as blacksmiths, laborers, coopers, or farmhands—roles that required physical strength and skill. Some may have worked on properties like the Stephenson estate, helping to shape the very buildings and fences still standing today. Free Black women frequently labored as laundresses, cooks, or domestic servants, but their influence extended into the spiritual and

By 1820, Madison County, which included Edwardsville, recorded a small but significant number of free Black individuals. Some had purchased their own freedom or had been freed by former enslavers. Others had been born free to parents who had seized the narrow paths toward liberty that

social lives of their communities as well. Oral histories and archival records suggest that networks of mutual aid and quiet resistance existed even then, providing

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(Book, continued from page 1)

Edwardsville, where his final residence now serves as the 1820 Colonel Benjamin Stephenson House museum.

The book places Stephenson's story within the larger currents of American history—including the Revolutionary War, westward expansion, and early state politics—while highlighting the social and familial networks that shaped the lives of Illinois's early settlers. Through Denny's lens, we meet not only a remarkable statesman but also the many interconnected individuals who built a community, navigated a complex political landscape, and contributed to a growing nation.

Denny, a retired professor of anthropology at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and coauthor of "The Ancient Splendor of Prehistoric Cahokia", brought his archaeological expertise and passion for storytelling to every page. He was also a key figure in preserving Illinois history, serving as an early board member of the Cahokia Mounds Museum Society, president of the Illinois Archaeological

Survey, and a member of the Illinois Department of Conservation Historic Sites Advisory Board. But to those who knew him, his most cherished role was as a teacher and a steward of the past.

Historians and scholars have already praised the book's contribution. James A. Edstrom, author of *Avenues of Transformation*, calls it "a fine work of scholarship" that "brings a forgotten Illinois statesman back to life," while historian Robert Paulett commends Denny's "labor of love" for recovering stories of settlement, slavery, and Native dispossession that shaped the region.

Now available for \$23.50, *Colonel Benjamin Stephenson & the History of Early Illinois* is more than a book—it's a powerful link between past and present, a testament to the enduring importance of community-based historical research, and a reminder of why the Colonel Benjamin Stephenson House remains such a vital site of learning and preservation.

Pick up your copy today in the museum shop or order online to own this compelling chapter of Illinois history.

Step Into the Past This Summer

Looking for a one-of-a-kind summer experience that brings history to life? The 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House invites young historians to step back in time with two immersive summer camps designed to ignite imaginations and spark a love for early American life.



Mrs. Lucy's Academy for Young Ladies **June 25–27 | 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM**

For girls ages 8–12

Girls are cordially invited to explore the world of an 1820s American girl at Mrs. Lucy's Academy for Young Ladies. Over the course of three delightful days, campers will engage in hands-on activities like sewing, etiquette lessons, journaling, drawing, cooking, and writing with quill and ink—all while wearing beautiful reproduction dresses that make history come alive.

This immersive experience is designed to reflect the daily life of young girls in the early 19th century, right here in the new state of Illinois. Snacks, water, and all project supplies are provided—campers only need to bring a sack lunch and a curious spirit!

Note: This popular camp is almost full and limited to just **12 participants**.

Camp Fee: \$110 per camper (due at registration).

Pre-registration is required.

War of 1812 Militia Camp

July 16–18 | 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM

For boys and girls entering 5th–7th grade

Attention all young recruits! Experience the sights, sounds, and challenges of military life during the War of 1812 at our Militia Summer Camp.

Campers will drill like soldiers, post the colors, cook over an open fire, and learn all about early 19th-century camp life through hands-on history adventures.

Perfect for kids who love action, teamwork, and time travel, this camp offers a fun and engaging way to understand our nation's past—right in their own backyard.

Spots are limited to 12 campers.

Camp Fee: \$110 (includes snacks and supplies).

Campers must bring a sack lunch.

Pre-registration and payment are required.

Don't Miss Your Chance to Join the Adventure!

Learn more and register today at

www.stephensonhouse.org.

Spots are filling fast—secure yours before they're gone!





Greetings from the President

Dearest Gentle Volunteers,

Happy Spring as we head toward Summer!!! I hope everyone is as excited as I am.

The Gardens are beginning their stroll through beauty! Have you taken the time to walk through the gardens and smell a flower or two? When you do and you see something you love or it impresses you, leave a note for our Master Gardeners.

The Camps are about to begin! If you see young ladies around The House, know they are in training. Mrs. Lucy's Academy for Young Ladies will begin on June 25th. For July we will be having the War of 1812 Militia Summer Camp. Get your young people signed up.

Speaking of signing up, I know we are half way through the year but still let folks know they can still become Members. Every member counts and helps The House.

A big thank you to all the volunteers that helped with Trivia night. It was great and we had fun which you can see on Facebook from all the photos!! And thank you to our sponsors and donators. You are so appreciated.

The fun is not over! We have tickets for the Great Grill and Meat Raffle. Yes, if you or a loved one likes to grill, get some tickets for them. Get all your friends involved in this raffle that will give SOOOO much for a small donation.

And one more thing, if you have any extra time, please check out the schedule and get a few extra hours to volunteer. We are in need to be able to keep the house open and to do tours. Your time is very valuable and appreciated to us.

Well, until next time, enjoy your summer time and see you all at The House.

Yours Truly,

Lady Blue

Celebrate Father's Day Weekend with a Sweet Step Back in Time

This Father's Day weekend, the Stephenson House invites guests to enjoy a heartwarming, history-filled afternoon at its upcoming event, **"Desserts of the Early 19th Century: 'My Favorite Guy' Edition,"** on **Friday, June 14, from 4:00 to 5:30 pm.**

Whether you're celebrating a father, grandfather, mentor, or cherished friend (*male or female*), this unique event offers the perfect setting to create meaningful memories over a table full of historic sweets. Held in the beautifully restored dining room of the 1820s-era Stephenson House, guests will step back in time and sample a delicious array of period-authentic desserts once enjoyed by early 19th-century families.

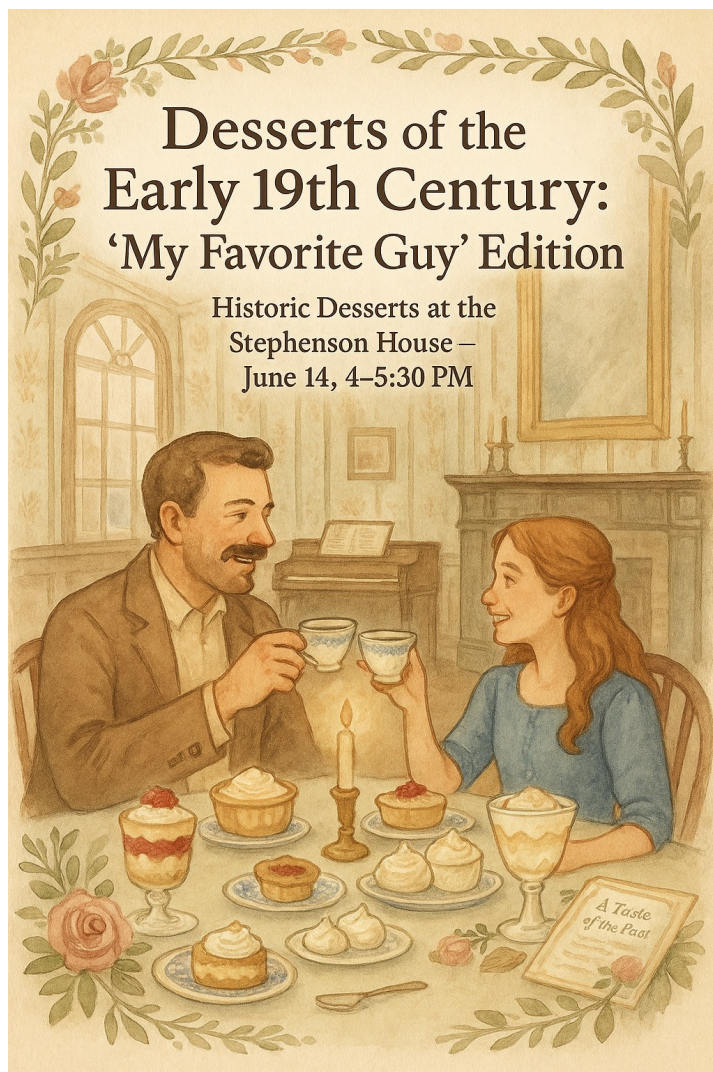
In addition to tasting these time-tested treats, participants will learn about the ingredients, cultural customs, and daily domestic life of the era. Every guest will receive a keepsake packet of historic recipes to try at home and continue the sweet celebration.

Tickets are \$40 per person, and the event is open to ages **16 and up**. Seating is extremely limited—only **10 spots available**—and advance reservations are required. Tickets can be purchased at: www.stephensonhouse.org

Guests are encouraged to **come hungry**—dinner won't be necessary with so many desserts on the table!

Important Notes for Attendees:

- Your **online receipt** serves as your ticket. Please present it at the gift shop upon arrival.



- Desserts may contain **common allergens** including flour, nuts, and dairy. Please notify staff in advance of any dietary restrictions.
- Full refunds will be issued only if the event is canceled by the site. No refunds will be given for cancellations made less than **48 hours** before the event or for unused tickets.

Don't miss this opportunity to celebrate, indulge, and learn—all in one sweet afternoon.



Tickets \$2 each or six for \$10

Raffle
Includes

Dk's Meat Bundle

Hamel, Illinois

Includes:

- 5 lbs Ground Round
- 5 lbs New York Strip Steak
- 5 lbs Sirloin Steak
- 5 lbs Pork Kabob

&

Gas Grill

Tickets can be purchased at the museum, online (www.stephensonhouse.org) or from any board member.

Drawing will be held live from the Route 66 Festival on our Facebook page at 5 pm, June 7, 2025.

1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House
P.O. Box 754 (mailing only)
409 S. Buchanan, Edwardsville
618-692-1818

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support and protection.

One such hub of community was Pin Oak Colony, located approximately 6 to 10 miles east of Edwardsville, near what is now Marine Road (Illinois Route 143) in Pin Oak Township. Established in the 1820s by anti-slavery Governor Edward Coles, the settlement was home to formerly enslaved individuals Coles had freed upon his arrival from Virginia. He helped them acquire farmland and begin new lives as free citizens. Pin Oak Colony grew into one of Illinois's earliest Black farming communities and, at its peak, was home to approximately 300 residents.

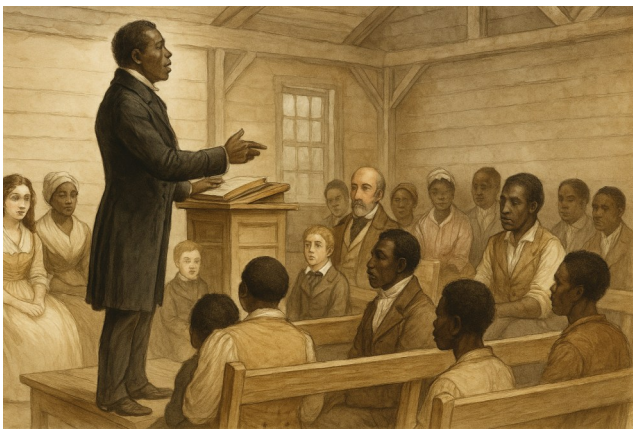


Image created by an artist for Stephenson House. 2025(c)

Though few physical traces remain today, the legacy of resilience and landownership lives on.

Among the freed individuals Coles emancipated was Robert “Uncle Bobby” Crawford, who became a central spiritual figure in the region. After settling in Madison County as a tenant farmer on Coles’s land, Crawford founded Mt. Zion Baptist Church—also known as Ridge Prairie Church—around 1825. Located near the Pin Oak community, it was one of the earliest Black Baptist congregations in Illinois.

Known for his warmth, wisdom, and deep faith, Crawford preached not only to his fellow freedmen but also to white residents in the surrounding area—an uncommon and remarkable occurrence for the time. His ability to minister across racial lines reflected both his spiritual leadership and the respect he earned within

the broader frontier community. Though no known images of Crawford exist, his legacy lives on in the cultural and religious foundations he helped build.

Illinois's Black Codes, passed in 1819, required free Black residents to carry papers proving their status and sharply restricted their rights. Yet, many chose to stay, to raise families, and to build lives with dignity. The churches they founded, like Crawford’s Mt. Zion, and informal schools likely served as centers of cultural preservation, education, and hope.

Understanding this part of Edwardsville’s history adds necessary depth to the story we tell at the Stephenson House. It reminds us that the early American narrative is not only about founding fathers and frontier politics—it is also about resilience, resistance, and community-building by those who were often excluded from the documents of record.

As we continue our mission to educate and preserve the past, we honor the memory of Edwardsville’s early free Black residents—farmers, ministers, laborers, and leaders. Their legacy is woven into the very soil of this town and deserves to be told alongside every other chapter of our shared history.

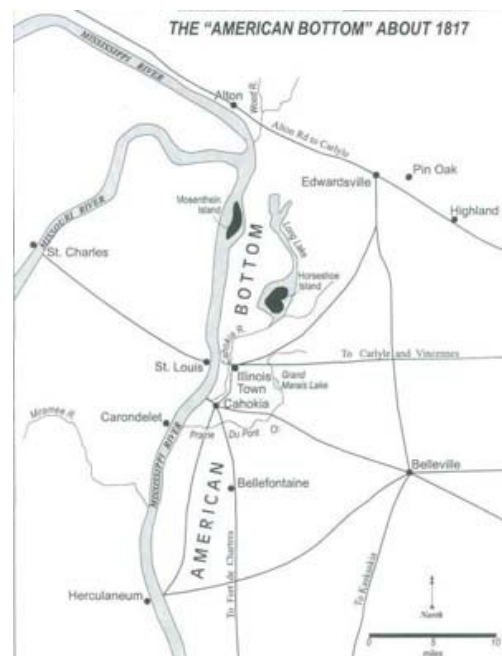


Photo Credit: Illinois Periodicals Online (<https://www.lib.niu.edu/index.html>), *Pin Oak Colony* article (after Olin D. Morrison, *Illinois Prairie: State Historical Atlas*, (Athens, Ohio: Morrison, 1960), p. 52.)

News & Needs

Thank You...

...Mary Heeren for the donation of clear storage bags.

...John Williams for repairing the brick in the alley.

Needs...

- Volunteers to help at the museum giving tours, covering the gift shop, and cleaning.
- Someone to split firewood.
- Do you need service hours? We can help! There are a variety of jobs and projects we'd love to have help with.

- Please return Volunteer Training binders, if you have one.

Wanted...

- **Summer/Fall/Spring Internship Alert!**

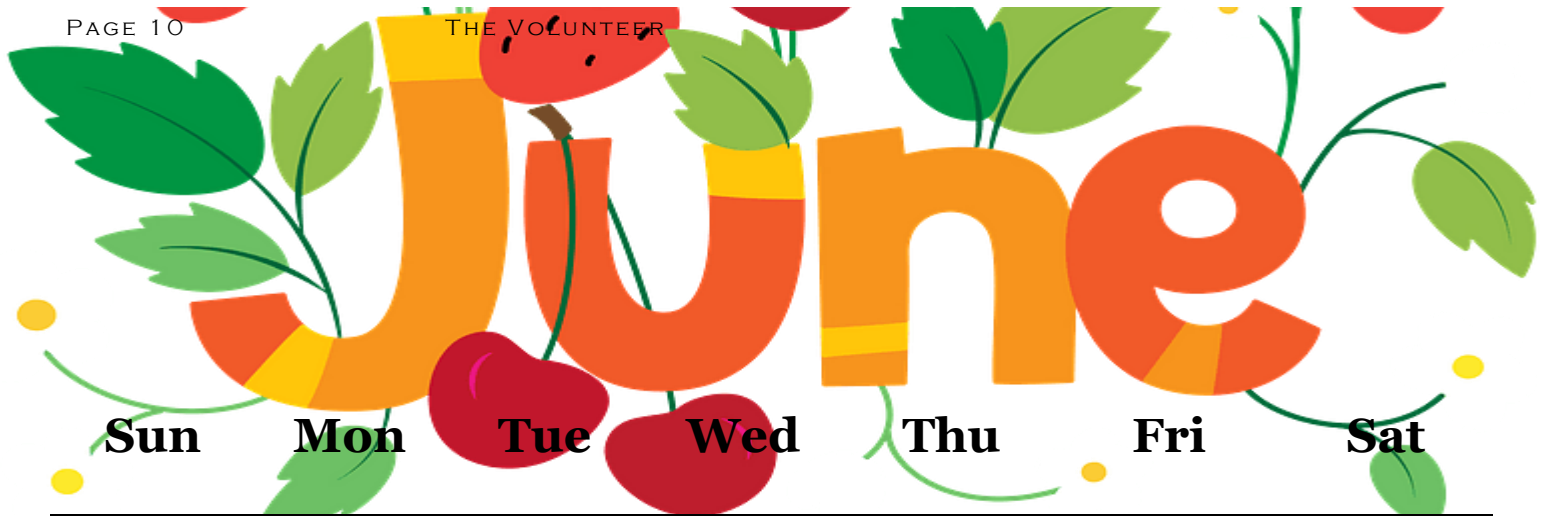
Make history come alive at the 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House! We have three internships available:

1. Videographer – Film stories & events
2. Social Media – Share history with style
3. Admin – Learn museum & nonprofit ops

Apply now: <https://stephensonhouse.org/internships-%26-volunteers-1>

Upcoming Events, Tours & Activities

- June 7, **Route 66 Festival**, 10 am. We'll be hosting the 1950s Diner tent again this year. Stop by for a photo op and to get your **Great Grill & Meat Raffle** tickets. Drawing will be broadcast live on our Facebook page at 5 pm.
- June 12, **Tour**, 15+/- Adults, 10 am—12 pm.
- June 14, **Desserts of the Early 19th Century: "My Favorite Guy" Edition**, 4-5:50 pm. Tickets available at www.stephensonhouse.org
- June 19, **Juneteenth, Freedom Day** 10 am—3 pm. While our newest documentary "Voices Unleashed" introduces guests to the history of slavery in Illinois, our tours this will focus on the indentured servants who lived and worked on the farm.
- June 24, **Board Meeting**, 7 pm
- June 25-27, **Mrs. Lucy's Academy for Young Ladies**, 9 am-2 pm



1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Route 66 Festival Raffle Drawing 5pm
8	9	10	11	12 Tour 15 +/- Adults 10 am	13	14 Desserts of the Early 19th Century: "My Favorite Guy" Edition 4-5:30 pm
15 HAPPY Father's DAY	16	17	18	19 Freedom Day JUNE TEENTH JUNE 19	20	21
22	23	24 Board Meeting 7pm	25	26	27	28
29	30					

Mrs. Lucy's Academy for Young Ladies

Be Our Friend...

*Renew your membership or become a new Friend.
Fill out and mail the following information to us.*

YES! I want to help. Enclosed is my contribution:

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State & ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____ Membership Level: _____

Please send me information about volunteering at Stephenson House.

Checks should be made payable to the:

Friends of the Col. Benjamin Stephenson House

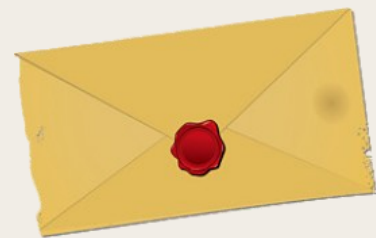
Payments may also be made in our online store:

www.stephensonhouse.org

***Memberships are from January to December.** Benefits of membership are extended to an individual and his/her immediate family. We accept cash, check or credit card donations. Memberships are extended for monetary donations only. The Friends of Col. Benjamin Stephenson House is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization FIN 37-1395804



**Send your membership to the
Friends of the Col. Benjamin
Stephenson House
P.O. Box 754
Edwardsville, IL 62025**



Membership Levels

Friend of Ben & Lucy
\$25

Stephenson Family Friend
\$50

Landmark Friend
\$100

Heritage Friend
\$250

Living History Friend
\$500

Founding Friend
\$1,000 or more

**Corporate membership information
available upon request.**

Our Board of Directors & Staff

Muriel Jones, *President*

RoxAnn Raisner, *Site Director*

Peggy Emling, *Vice President*

Phil Stack, *Bookkeeper*

Rachel Hill, *Treasurer*

Stacey Lipe *Secretary*

Sean Goding

Andrea Miracle

Kathleen Schmidt

Jason Stacey

Jaclyn Wallace

Leslie Wood



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