

When In Doubt, Don't Throw It Out!

An Archival Handbook for Missouri State University Record Keepers

By

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Preface

In 1996, the University Libraries, under the leadership of Dean Karen Horny, placed Mission Enhancement funds into developing a Special Collections and Archives Department. The purpose of creating such a department was to preserve and provide access to the university's significant holdings of rare books, specialized subject collections, manuscripts, and institutional records, including those of the campus and those of outside organizations (such as area labor union records stored in the Ozarks Labor Union Archives). Essentially, the library wanted to ensure the survival of the university's many documents of enduring value.

One of the major components of the new department was the records of previous university presidential administrations and related university publications, documents, and artifacts documenting Missouri State's history. Yearbooks, photographs, scrapbooks, and presidential files provided the nucleus for the department's University Archives unit. Although initially small with just over a hundred or so boxes of material, the unit was actually the most important unit since it was the only office on campus with a *de facto* charge to preserve the university's corporate or institutional memory. No other office or off-campus agency is dedicated to the collection of Missouri State University's records, hence the importance of a university archives in preserving those unique records which are created by the administrators, faculty, staff and students of the university. This, indeed, is the role of an institution's archive: to appraise, collect, organize, describe, preserve, and make available records of historical, legal, administrative, or fiscal value.

By 2002-2003, the university began planning for its centennial celebration. Around the same time a grant was awarded to the Special Collections and Archives Department by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to formally establish the University Archives, survey and collect records from at least twenty-five representative campus offices, and preserve those records for future generations. The two-year grant funded project enabled the department to meet with a number of campus records custodians (secretaries, department heads, faculty, and other administrators), conduct a census of the records in several offices, and transfer into the University Archives over 400 cubic feet of records. A number of treasures were uncovered from all across campus, including minute books of the Carrington Literary Society dating back to 1906, *Ozarko* photographs, numerous publications, and important files chronicling the growth of campus during the past 100 years.

The project was successful in terms of communicating the role of the University Archives to those offices which were surveyed. But one of the goals of the project was to also create an archives handbook for the benefit of the entire campus. This handbook is designed to assist you by introducing you to the archives and the University Archives' mission, along with illustrating the importance of saving Missouri State University's documentary heritage (whether it is a handwritten letter from former President Duane G. Meyer or an email from yesterday's departmental strategic planning committee). More importantly, this handbook will explain what the University Archives can do for you and your office. A couple of years ago, the

university spent over \$10,000 for filing cabinets alone. Some of that money could have been used elsewhere if records were transferred to the archives or if simple records management practices were implemented annually.

Today the University Archives houses nearly 1,000 cubic feet of material, representing dozens of university offices and organizations. Record keepers from across campus have entrusted these materials to the archives, knowing that their records are in a stable, secure, climate controlled environment, staffed by professionals. An added benefit is that the records can normally be retrieved far more efficiently at the archives than from a basement or an off-site warehouse. Campus administrators and organizations also know that the records they have transferred will help future students, faculty, staff, administrators, and outside researchers better understand and appreciate Missouri State's legacy.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Archives

An archive, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is a “place in which public records or other important historic documents are kept.” The term is also used to describe the historic documents or records being preserved. (Essentially, archives are stored in archives!) Although the term is archaic, the records or documents that are stored in archives include any and all material created or received by an individual, organization, or institution in the course of conducting business.

The University Archives is currently the *de facto* official repository for the historical records of Missouri State University, and as such, identifies, acquires, preserves, and provides access to records of enduring value. Its primary purpose is to serve the administrative, teaching, research, and public service needs of the university and other user communities. In order to fulfill this purpose, the University Archives collects as comprehensively as possible those records that document the history of Missouri State University, its administration, programs, services, and members of its community.

It should be noted that archival materials can take many forms, such as paper correspondence, receipts, ledgers, minute books, emails, CD-ROM publications, photographs, and audio-visual recordings (tape or digital) of performances or meetings. The format is variable; it is the content of the material that determines whether or not it is saved for posterity. The records, regardless of format, are preserved because they chronicle the history and development of the university. It is important to recognize, however, that not all documents created by the university merit permanent preservation. Preserving documents indefinitely is an expensive proposition. The cost of archival supplies and equipment, staff salaries and time, and even the expense of maintaining stable temperature and humidity levels, are considerable.

Chief among the University Archives' objectives are to:

- Provide information to the university officials in a timely manner;
- Provide instructional support through assistance of student research and development of curricular projects in cooperation with the university faculty;
- Support the university's outreach services via its public relations and extension offices;
- Promote and support scholarly/historical research relating to the historical activities of Missouri State University and the broader university community; and,
- Coordinate general archives and records management policies and procedures.

In the end, the most important, wide-ranging service performed by the University Archives is the selection and preservation of documents which contain the core memory of the institution. This collective memory is valuable to the institution and assists in fulfilling its larger mission of developing educated students, conducting research, and serving the community in the broadest sense of the word. In this context, the University Archives plays an important role in assisting various offices by preserving and providing access (quickly and efficiently) to the archival records.

Chapter 2

What the University Archives Collects and Transferring Materials

The University Archives serves as the institutional memory of the university by identifying, acquiring, preserving, and providing access to records of enduring value. To do this, the archives staff works closely with the campus “record keepers” – those people who create and maintain the records of Missouri State University. Record keepers are encouraged to contact the archivists prior to discarding any potentially archival material. The mantra of the University Archives is “When in doubt, don’t throw it out.” The staff is always willing to discuss the records-related questions of the campus community.

Generally, the University Archives collects the following types of records:

1. Records of the governing board and administration, including constitutions and by-laws, agendas and minutes, correspondence, annual reports and budgets, and subject files concerning projects, activities, and functions;
2. Records of departments, including minutes, reports, syllabi, correspondence and memoranda (incoming and outgoing), and subject files;
3. Records of campus-related committees and organizations (including academic, honorary, service, and social organizations of students, faculty, administrators, and staff on campus) including minutes, correspondence, and subject files;
4. Historical files documenting policies, committee and task force reports, and surveys;
5. Publications: Copies of all newsletters, journals, brochures, monographs, event programs, class schedules, catalogs, posters, and announcements distributed in the name of the university. (*To simplify transfer of publications, the University Archives should be placed on college, department, and office mailing lists to receive all future publications*);
6. Special format materials documenting the operation and development of the institution (e.g., audio-visuals: photographs, maps, blueprints, digital images, films, and sound and video recordings).

On the other side of the coin, the University Archives usually does **not** accept:

1. Records that are still used on a regular basis by office personnel;
2. Records of specific financial transactions (e.g., receipts, purchase orders, order forms);

3. Student records, health records, and personnel records;
4. Routine letters of transmittal and acknowledgment.

Some of the materials the University Archives does not collect do merit permanent preservation by the university and are maintained by their originating office. (For example, student transcripts, health records, or personnel files.) The above lists are not meant to be exhaustive and are intended as a general guide. Campus record keepers are encouraged to contact archives personnel before disposing of any records. More often than not, a simple phone conversation can determine whether or not the archives would be interested in a particular set of documents.

Transfer of documents to the University Archives can be initiated in a number of ways. From time to time, records are transferred due to a renovation project (such as when documents are surprisingly found in an attic or basement of an older campus building); during administrative changes at the department head, dean, vice president, and president levels; or when campus record keepers (administrative assistants, secretaries, etc.) run out of space to store important records. Sometimes an office refers to the Missouri State Records Retention Schedules, which indicate a transfer of older documents to the archives.

In some cases, records are transferred to the archives on a regular basis. For example, the University Archives regularly receives a copy of the Board of Governors minutes, minutes of the Faculty Senate, and other documents such as various flyers and programs published by the Theatre and Dance Department and materials put out by the Publications Office.

When contacted by an office about potentially archival materials, the University Archives has several steps it follows to determine the value of the materials, move them to the Archives, and make them available for research use. The basic steps are outlined below:

Survey the Records

When an individual campus office is ready to transfer records to the archives, staff from the archives can visit the transferring office to conduct a brief survey. The survey may take only an hour or so, or it may take a day or two depending on the volume and nature of the records being considered. At that time, the archivists will work with the record keepers to determine the value of the materials, the frequency of use, and decide if any restrictions should be placed on the collection. Generally, materials in the University Archives are available for all researchers, but occasionally it is determined that materials should be restricted for a specific period of time.

Appraise the Materials

Around the time of the survey, archives personnel, in cooperation with the office which created the records, will appraise the documents. Document appraisal is basically the process used to determine whether or not a particular set of records (or record groups/series) deserves to be preserved “forever.” For example, daily

financial records from the 1980s and 1990s will not be as important as monthly budget reports or annual reports for those same years. Emails arranging casual lunch appointments between colleagues in a department are not as important as emails initiating executive decisions or policy changes from a dean.

Several factors are brought into play on any appraisal. Basically the archives is looking to see if the records in question contain long lasting, historical importance regarding fiscal, legal, and administrative matters. Other factors archivists consider when conducting an appraisal include age of the documents, their condition (moldy documents may be rejected so as to not contaminate other holdings in the archives), format (are they on 5¼" floppy disks and can the data still be retrieved?), and whether another record exists which duplicates the information within the pending donation.

Transfer the Files to the University Archives

Once an appraisal decision is made, the records are transferred to the University Archives located in the Special Collections and Archives Department on the third floor of Duane G. Meyer Library. Archives personnel will coordinate the transfer with the record keepers and will provide the boxes, other supplies, and manpower necessary to transfer the materials. Generally, the record keepers are asked to keep the records in their original locations and order until the transfer, to help the archivists better understand how the original documents were used and maintained.

Accession the Records

Once transferred, archives personnel will accession (or log) the materials into the overall archives inventory. Sometimes a box list is created as part of this log to assist in retrieving certain records for researchers. The originating office will receive a transfer form giving these details about the transfer.

Indeed, this is one of many services and benefits of transferring records to the archives. Archivists are trained to preserve, store, and provide access to the records placed in their care, and campus offices generally value the reference services provided by knowledgeable archives staff. Archives personnel can look up records, assist records custodians in tracking down certain information (e.g., resolutions, memoranda, or meeting minutes), and provide photocopies for the office. In nearly all cases, records transferred to the archives can be used and referred to more easily within the confines of the archives than in a dimly lit basement or cramped closet.

Process the Materials

In some cases, accessioned collections will be processed or arranged and described in such a way as to allow researchers to pinpoint specific files or subjects. When archivists process collections, they follow certain procedures and techniques to assure the long term preservation of the documents (removing staples or acidic paper) and to describe the nature, scope, and content of the records. Much of this information is included in a guide or inventory of the collection, called a finding aid. A finding aid is basically a tool that allows researchers to learn more about a

collection and to select specific file folders or boxes that may be relevant to his research interests.

Archives personnel regularly work on processing collections, but fully processing a collection with a finished finding aid is a laborious and time intensive endeavor. The Special Collections and Archives Department has been awarded an additional one-year grant from the NHPRC that will allow the project archivist to dedicate her time to processing records of Missouri State University. Even with this support, some accessions will remain “unprocessed.” However, nearly all university records stored in the archives are available for public use and many possess a rudimentary box list to assist in tracking down particular folders or items.

Records stored in the archives are available to the public and the university community, but they do not circulate or leave the library. When called for, university records are used in a secure reading room, and patrons using the collections fill out a user registration form. Great care is taken to protect the records entrusted to the archives since all unpublished university records are unique to Missouri State University alone. If someone steals or damages a letter from former president Roy Ellis dating to the 1940s, it is lost forever. Due to the unique nature of the materials under their care, archivists take security and preservation seriously.

Preservation and security of archival records is, indeed, important. But campus administrators have additional reasons to deposit records with the archive. Those offices which choose to transfer their records to the University Archives discover three benefits:

- They save space. Transferring inactive records out of an office area makes filing equipment and office space available for newer, more active records.
- Cost savings. Filing cabinets and off-site storage fees can be expensive. Those expenses can be avoided if records retention schedules are followed and select records are transferred to the archives.
- Better access to the records. Records transferred to the archives are carefully preserved for future use. Your records are less likely to get lost when they are maintained by the University Archives.

Many individuals have already enjoyed the benefits of transferring their records to the archives. Former presidents, faculty members, and administrators have deposited their papers and continue to send important documents to the archives for safe keeping. By placing university records in the archives, campus administrators assure the survival and availability of those records for future generations.

Chapter 3

Records Management

Records management is important to any institutional archives because it establishes the selection and regular transfer of records to the archives. While it is most often thought of in the context of an important administrative/management tool, records management is also a key component to securing the preservation of those records which merit deposit in an archives.

Missouri State does not currently have a formal campus-wide records management program, but record keepers across campus, by necessity, are faced with the issue of what to do with the records in their offices. The information in this section is provided as a very basic guide and overview on this topic.

Life Cycle of Records

The field of records management revolves around the concept of a record's life cycle. A formal records management program provides a set of policies and procedures designed to control the handling and storage of an organization's records through the various stages or life cycles of a record.

The first stage of a record's life cycle is its creation or "birth." The office that creates a record is referred to as the office of origin. The date that a formal letter is written and/or sent, for example, marks the origination or birth of that document.

The second stage is the active use of the record, which requires the organization, handling, and maintenance of that record for immediate or frequent access. Records in this category are stored in a filing system located within or near the office of origin. For example, correspondence from a dean may reside in the dean's desk cabinet for a year or two. Later, after a few years, the older correspondence may be relocated to a cabinet down the hall or in the administrative assistant's office.

The third stage in the cycle is when a record becomes inactive or semi-active. At this state, a record is seldom or no longer needed on a regular basis and can be separated from the active records. A records management program often provides for off site storage (a records center for example) yet still allows for that infrequent need for access. Most state governments, the federal government, and some large research universities operate records centers for temporarily storing records.

The final stage in the life cycle of a record occurs when a record no longer has its original administrative, fiscal, or legal value and can be destroyed. However, and this is important, those records that have a secondary value of a historical or research nature may warrant transfer to the archives rather than destruction.

While there are exceptions to every rule, essentially, when records leave stage three of their life cycle, they either go to the underworld (a landfill); or to purgatory (a records center); or to survive in heaven, the archives! Only a select few will make

it to the archives. Most records (about 95% for most organizations) are eventually destroyed.

The value of a properly implemented records management program cannot be overstated. Records management programs can control the volume of records maintained, making active records more accessible, especially through the regular segregation of inactive records from active records. A regular management program frees up storage space in offices by transferring inactive records to a separate records storage center (generally to a more cost effective storage facility) and by regularly scheduled destruction of records. Records management procedures save an organization money by reducing the need to purchase added storage units, shelving, boxes, cabinets, etc., and by encouraging a more cost-effective and efficient workflow.

A well implemented records management program can provide improved access to all records, both active and inactive through inventory control. And finally, institutions which practice sound records management policies identify records at the front end of the records life cycle that warrant permanent preservation and establish procedures for the timely transfer of documents to the archives.

Records Retention Schedules

Even though Missouri State University does not have a formal records management program, it is responsible for following the State of Missouri Retention and Disposition Schedules that set forth the required time certain records must be retained by an office. Under state guidelines, all records of a state agency must be listed on either a General Records Schedule issued by the Secretary of State's Records Management Division (RMD) or on an agency-specific records schedule developed jointly by the agency and RMD, and then approved by the State Records Commission.

The revised retention schedules for Missouri State University have been under review by the State Records Commission for the past several years. New schedules updating the 1987 Records Disposition Schedules await approval by the Commission (as of November 2005).

According to the Records Appraisal and Scheduling Standard for State Agencies that was approved by the Missouri State Records Commission on June 15, 2005: "The retention schedule serves many purposes: records inventory, functional outline of agency operations, guidance to agency employees who work with the records, compliance with statutory and legal record keeping requirements, retention periods of closed records based on analysis of business processes, legal authorization to destroy obsolete records, and transfer of permanent records... for preservation."

Records retention schedules revolve around the definition or classification of a record. The type or nature of a record, therefore, determines its *disposition*. (The disposition of a record is basically its ultimate fate. This could be destruction after a certain number of years, or it could be microfilmed and then destroyed, or it could be sent to an archives.)

A “record” is defined by Missouri’s State and Local Records Law as follows:
RSMo 109.210 (5) “Record”, document, book, paper, photograph, map, sound recording or other material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to law or in connection with the transaction of official business.”

The State and Local Records Law also defines what is not a record as follows:
RSMo 109.210 (5) Library and museum material made or acquired and preserved solely for reference or exhibition purposes, extra copies of documents preserved only for convenience of reference, and stocks of publications and of processed documents are not included within the definition of records as used in sections 109.200 to 109.310, and are hereinafter designated as “nonrecord” materials.

The Missouri Secretary of State’s office, which is responsible for the state’s Record Management program, maintains a website with helpful instructions on how to determine what is or is not a record, as well as other related information. Go to <http://www.sos.state.mo.us/records/recmgmt/>, then click on “Resources” on the left to access the ‘What is A Record?’ guide.

Retention periods on the schedules are centered on two key concepts: **record series** and **records cutoff**. Record series are file units or documents arranged according to a filing system or kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific type of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use. Record cutoff refers to the breaking, or ending, of files at a regular interval, usually at the close of a fiscal or calendar year, to permit their disposal or transfer in complete blocks. The cutoff date marks the beginning of the records retention period. Retention periods represent the **minimum time records must be held after the cutoff**.

New standards adopted in 2005 by the Missouri State Records Commission established the format of Records Schedules for state agencies. The new format must include at least the following features:

- the record series title;
- a detailed description of the records, including closure event (i.e., fiscal, calendar year, or case closure) and description of all related copies of the record;
- the cutoff date or event;
- the retention period for each relevant copy; and
- the disposition action (shredding, incineration, transfer to archives, etc.) for each relevant copy.

In July 2003, the Missouri State Records Commission approved a “General” Records Retention and Disposition Schedule (MoGRS) that identifies records that are commonly maintained in many offices and establishes the retention periods for these widespread records. A document entitled “Record Series Descriptions, A Guide to Missouri’s General Retention Schedule” provides additional information to assist in categorizing documents. Those documents that fall under MoGRS will not be listed separately under individual office or department schedules. As of July 2005, MoGRS was still a work-in-progress and should not be viewed as complete.

The Records Management Division of the Secretary of State’s office and Missouri State University are working together to establish a records retention system that will hopefully meet the needs of campus record keepers. Until new schedules are approved, Special Collections and Archives will gladly assist offices with questions about records retention and disposition. Archives personnel cannot always make the final determination on records but will work with record keepers to help find the answers they need.

Chapter 4

Archival Tips and Preservation

The following provides general information for storing and preserving documents of various types. Readers are encouraged to contact the archives should they have any questions or if they need additional information. In cases of water damage, mildew, mold, or vermin infestations, campus record keepers should first follow their in-house disaster plan and then immediately contact the University Archives (836-4298) for assistance or advice in halting or mitigating any damage caused to the records. Following the basic tips and advice below can prolong the life of your records and provide a safe and efficient work place.

In-house (department) storage and preservation

Avoid bare wood or wood composition shelving. Wood contains acids which can leach out and damage your collection. Oak wood is especially acidic. Try not to place shelves or other storage units along exterior walls. These areas are subject to the temperature and humidity changes outside, which can lead to moisture buildup, condensation and mold. Avoid placing storage furniture directly under water or steam pipes.

Documents

Proper storage and housing can greatly affect the life and health of your collections of books, documents, and photographs. Choose a storage area with a moderate, stable environment. Try to keep the temperature in storage areas below 72 degrees Fahrenheit. Cooler temperatures slow down the destructive chemical reactions inside paper. Try for a relative *humidity* between 40% and 55%. When the humidity is too low, documents become dry and brittle. When the humidity is too high, documents can warp and grow mold. Widely varying temperature and humidity levels cause paper fibers to expand and contract. This causes internal stresses that can be very damaging to paper. High humidity can lead to the development of foxing (small brown disfiguring spots in paper) or mold growth. For these reasons, avoid places such as basements, attics, garages, and laundry rooms for collections storage.

Choose a place that doesn't get too much *light*. Light, especially ultraviolet light, is very damaging to documents. Ultraviolet light comes primarily from sunlight and fluorescent lights. Light speeds up chemical reactions in paper. Light can also bleach paper and cause colored papers and inks to fade. Turn off lights when the room is not in use.

It is best to store paper items flat rather than folding and unfolding, which can lead to creases and tears. Place documents inside folders, then place the folders inside a box or other rigid enclosure. Consider removing rubber bands from around materials. Boxes should be packed just full enough that the documents inside are well supported and do not curve.

Rubber bands tend to melt and/or harden and can stain documents. Also consider using stainless steel paperclips and staples to prevent rust marks on

documents. Avoid using tape of any kind on documents when preparing them for storage. Tape adhesives can sink into and saturate the paper. They can also ooze out from under their carriers, sticking to and staining nearby documents.

Label folders and boxes with complete information about its contents to minimize unnecessary handling of the documents inside.

Newspaper articles

Newspaper clippings are often highly acidic, and the acid can migrate to other documents and cause staining. The best way to save the *information* on newspaper clippings is to photocopy them onto a good quality paper.

Photographs

Photo emulsions are especially sensitive to fingerprints and oils. At minimum, hands should be thoroughly washed before working with photographs. White cotton gloves are often worn when handling photos.

Maps, Posters, Oversized Materials

Whenever possible, store large maps, blueprints, and other documents flat, instead of folded or rolled. Blueprints and color photographs are extremely susceptible to light damage.

Ephemeral Materials

Ephemeral materials include buttons, pins, paperweights, letter openers, greeting cards, post cards, badges, pennants, banners, and various items of limited use. They are best kept in clearly labeled, small boxes. Glass, metal, paper, cardstock, and cloth items all require slightly different procedures. Due to the wide variety of such items and their artifactual nature, archives staff should be contacted to discuss the best methods of storing and preserving such items.

Preservation in the University Archives

The archives facility is designed to provide a safe and secure environment for a wide variety of document types. In addition to a secure reading room and a climate controlled storage facility, the Special Collections and Archives Department also possesses a mid-level conservation laboratory. The conservation lab has the technical space and equipment to perform minor document repair, remove certain adhesives from documents, and treat documents contaminated by mildew or mold. Campus records custodians should not try to perform any conservation treatments on documents in their area. Should a particular document require cleaning, deacidification, or other treatment, archives personnel should be contacted.

Processing

After records are received in the University Archives, they will be processed following professional archival standards and procedures. Every effort is made during processing to maintain the integrity of the records as a group, while at the same time making them useable to researchers and preserving them from long- and short-term deterioration. The processing steps will include:

- Re-folding and re-boxing the materials into acid-free archival folders and boxes;
- Placing photographs and other special format materials in proper archival enclosures;
- Removing non-permanent or duplicate materials;
- Arranging the materials;
- Describing the materials with a folder-level inventory and summary description which will be available in the Archives and on its website.

The Special Collections and Archives Department purchases document enclosures (photo sleeves, folders, boxes) from reputable archival supply vendors who understand and address the issues involved in records preservation. Products are made of non-acidic paper with an alkaline reserve or buffer. Acid-free paper is also low-lignin or lignin-free.

Acidity causes paper to become weak, brittle, and discolored. Acid can migrate from poor quality enclosures to documents. An alkaline reserve or buffer in paper enclosures can help neutralize acids. Lignin is a substance in wood that breaks down into acid compounds as it ages. The lignin can be removed from wood fiber papers to produce a better quality paper.

Documents are also removed from binders and other plastic covers. Plastics made with polyvinyl chloride (also called PVC or vinyl) can be very harmful. PVC can emit hydrochloric acid as it ages. (If it smells like a beach ball, it is not of archival quality.) Inks, both manuscript and printed, can stick to the sleeve and detach from the document stored inside. Plastic films that are suitable for manufacture of "archival" enclosures include polyester, polyethylene, and polypropylene. Contact the archives if you have questions concerning the purchase and stability of archival supplies.

Document Fasteners

Fasteners such as rubber bands, staples, and paper clips are removed and replaced with plastic clips. Rubber bands can melt and/or harden and metal clips can rust.

Newspapers and News Articles

Newspapers are stored flat and folded only once (the main fold on the left). Newspaper articles are copied on to acid-free paper and often the old, original article is discarded.

In the end, always feel free to contact the staff of the University Archives if you have any questions regarding the storage and preservation of documents in your care. Archives personnel can also conduct a site visit to assist campus records custodians in assessing their environmental and storage situation.

Appendix A

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Appendix B

University Archives Transfer Authorization

Appendix C

Researcher Registration Form

Appendix D

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