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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

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NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Venice Multiple Property Group

B. Associated Historic Contexts

Initial Period of Development of the City of Venice, Florida
1925-1928

C. Geographical Data

That area included within the original town limits of the City of Venice, Florida.

☐ See continuation sheet

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Signature of certifying official State Historic Preservation Officer — Date 2/13/89

Florida State Historic Preservation Office, Bureau of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Amy Schlagel — Date 4/12/89

Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

XX See continuation sheet

SUMMARY

The Venice Multiple Property Group is significant under Criteria A and C on the local level in the areas of Social History and Community Planning and Development. The properties included are significant in the area of community planning as elements of the work of pioneer American city planner John Nolen. Nolen's plan of Venice followed his philosophy of comprehensive planning through its inclusion of housing, industry, public services, green spaces, commercial needs and traffic circulation. They are also significant in the area of social history for their association with the Labor Capitalism movement as initiated by the developer of the community, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Finally, the resources are architecturally significant as examples of the Mediterranean Revival style constructed in Florida's Boom Period of the 1920's.

INITIAL PERIOD OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY OF VENICE, FLORIDA

THE EARLY HISTORY OF VENICE

The area surrounding the present day city of Venice experienced limited growth during the second half of the nineteenth century. Economic and social upheavals associated with the Civil War and Reconstruction Periods retarded early development. Those few settlers who did locate here depended on stock raising, sugar cane and truck crops for their livelihoods. Although there was an awareness of the potential of citrus as a commercial crop, it was virtually ignored in the area until the 1880s. In 1882, Frank Higel purchased lands and established a citrus operation producing several lines of canned citrus such as jams, pickled orange peel, lemon juice, orange wine and "Pure Florida Orange Syrup." Higel's manufacturing operations were innovative due to the lack of rapid transportation for fresh fruit shipping.

By the turn of the century, Higel had a successful enterprise that helped lure more settlers to the area. The erection of a saw mill in 1905 and the extension railroad service in 1911 firmly established the growing community. The settlement of the community progressed slowly, however, and it remained a small fishing and farming center through 1924.

In 1925, at the height of the Florida Land Boom, Dr. F.H. Albee, an orthopedic surgeon, purchased 2,196 acres of land. Albee retained John Nolen, a world-renowned city planner, to design a city on his land. But before Albee had a chance to implement his development plan, he was approached with a proposal from the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers Union. The Union wished to increase its assets and holdings through the purchase of his land as the

site of a proposed retirement community for its members, as well as for its general development potential.

THE ASSOCIATION WITH LABOR HISTORY

As early as 1904 labor unions were examining the concept of establishing labor banks to increase the retirement and benefit accounts of the unions. The movement, known as Labor Capitalism, was a marked departure from the normal practices of unions founded to secure fair wages and good working conditions for their members. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers debated the issue of opening a labor bank as early as 1912, rejecting the proposal that year and in 1915, when it was again proposed.

In November, 1920, the Union approved a move establishing the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers' Cooperative National Bank. This would be the first labor bank to receive nationwide attention. Within two months, the Bank reported $1 million in deposits, growing to $26 million by 1924. The Union extended its banking operations to Hammond, Indiana (1921), Minneapolis, Minnesota (1922), and Spokane, Washington (1922). It also opened regional securities offices in Oregon, New York, Alabama, Pennsylvania, and California. By 1926, the union had opened 11 labor banks, accounting for almost one-third of such institutions in America.

In 1926, the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor expressed concern "that interests not concerned either in the welfare of employers or employees but prompted wholly for speculative gains will...mislead well-intentioned workers and unions into banking ventures and security or investment enterprises that will spell ruin to themselves and cast discredit and disaster upon the organized labor movement."

This concern was an apt analysis of the situation. Many banks in America were in financial trouble through bad loans secured with poor collateral. The Brotherhood Bank at Cleveland was among them. In 1925, it had extended loans based on $4 million worth of questionable collateral. Forced to remove this collateral from its assets by the United States Bank Examiners, the Brotherhood Investment Company and the Brotherhood Holding Company suffered a real loss of $4 million to the investment and holding companies.

Looking to recoup the losses, union representatives responded to reports of the fortunes being made in Florida real estate. They looked to Florida for investment opportunities. In 1925, the union negotiated with Dr. Albee and a number of other local landholders south of Sarasota to purchase 30,511.31 acres with over seven miles of Gulf frontage for $4,023,092. The purchase was

made public in September, 1925, with great expectations for the future development of the property.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers Corporation was organized to handle the land and the Venice Company was set up to market and sell the property. At first the Union planned to market large tracts, but the idea was soon replaced by a plan to develop and build a city on the Gulf and to drain and develop small farming acreage inland. The company retained noted city planner John Nolen to complete a plan for a city on the Gulf: Venice. The company selected George A. Fuller as contractor, retained the New York firm of Walker and Gillette as supervising architects, and hired Prentiss French as landscape architect.

JOHN NOLEN AND THE PLAN OF VENICE

John Nolen was a pioneer in American city planning. Born in 1869 in Philadelphia, he attended public schools and Girard College. He held various administrative and educational jobs after his graduation in 1884 . After several years working in the private sector, he entered the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School as an economics and public administration major. By the time of his graduation in 1893 at age 24, Nolen had determined administration problems were the most critical crisis in city government.

Nolen made a year-long visit to Europe in 1901-1902. There, instead of admiring the grand formal garden landscapes such as Versailles, he was most impressed with the economical and practical industrial city planning in such places as Dusseldorf, with its parks, fountains, playgrounds, belt lines, and zoning. This led him to enroll in the School of Landscape Design at Harvard University in 1903, and to his subsequent career in urban planning.

The prevailing philosophy of urban planning at the turn of the century centered on an approach pioneered by Daniel Burnham and Frederick Law Olmstead known as the "City Beautiful" movement. It held that through monumental public buildings, extensive park development, and control of such distractions as billboards, utility poles, and noise, a city could provide its inhabitants with improved environmental and living conditions. This movement resulted in the execution of plans for a number of American cities; but it failed to include the consideration of housing, social problems, and economics.

Nolen did not think this approach went far enough. His philosophy centered around concepts contained in the "Garden City" movement, as exemplified in Ebenezer Howard's Garden City of Letchworth, England. The Garden City provided an alternative to the Victorian industrial city. The principles included urban decentralization, the establishment of cities limited in size with balanced agricultural-industrial economy, the use of a

surrounding green belt to limit size, cooperative land holding to insure community benefit from rising land values, and the economic and social advantage of large-scale planning. Thus, he became a social reformer. He sought reform not through single-issue political or aesthetic movements, but through "comprehensive" city planning. Such an approach was not generally advocated by leading reformers, architects, or landscape architects of the era. In 1919, he observed "City planning...is not a movement to make cities beautiful in a superficial sense....It aims consciously to provide those facilities that are for the common good, that concern everybody."

Before completion of his training at Harvard, Nolen opened an office in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and planned the grounds of several homes in Ardmore and the factory grounds of Joseph Fels' soap plant. After graduating from Harvard, Nolen received several commissions including the job of advisor to the Park and Tree Commission of Charlotte, North Carolina. Later, he developed a complete city plan for Savannah, Georgia. Both were textbook "City Beautiful" approaches with large public buildings and tree-lined streets. Nolen expanded and built on his philosophies, moving cautiously toward comprehensive problem solving including beautification, parks, and playgrounds in addition to traffic problems, uncontrolled overlapping of industrial, commercial, and residential uses, the conflicting roles of government and business, and housing and social welfare responsibilities.

Nolen's concept was indeed a comprehensive one. He insisted sanitary, economic, and aesthetic laws were intradependent and could not be dealt with separately. He also recognized that each city was different due to its surroundings, economy, and population. Therefore, planning had to be tailored to the needs of the individual city. He was one of the first planners in America to propose the use of zoning, which had become popular in Europe. This proposal in 1909 was two years before the first U.S. zoning law was passed in New York City.

Based upon this philosophy, Nolen established one of the most diverse private planning practices in the country. Between 1915 and 1930 he undertook over 450 projects ranging from private homes to metropolitan regions of several million people. His projects included full scale comprehensive plans for 29 cities, 27 new towns (including seven for the federal government), and 17 state and regional studies. He also planned projects for factories, colleges, public and private housing projects, traffic and transportation networks, and administrative studies for various governmental agencies. His planning projects included Roanoke and San Diego (1907), Bridgeport (1915), Kingsport, Tennessee (1916), Farm City, North Carolina (1921), and Mariemont, New Jersey (1924).

Nolen worked extensively in Florida during the boom of the 1920s. Planned communities became very popular during the Boom Period in Florida. Orlando had a comprehensive plan by 1925, and St. Petersburg completed its plan in 1921 under Nolen's supervision. Nolen also completed comprehensive plans for West Palm Beach, Clearwater, Sarasota, and a preliminary study on Tampa. He was also commissioned to design several suburban residential communities in Florida: Belleair, near Clearwater; San Jose, near Jacksonville; Orangewood; Fort Myers; and St. Augustine Beach. Three towns he planned in undeveloped areas were Nokomis, Clewiston, and Venice.

Of the three towns Nolen planned in Florida, Venice had the most comprehensive plan. Nolen observed in writing about Venice: "city planning...will contribute to the rapid, sound, and permanent development of Florida. It will do much to safeguard and protect property values of investors and stabilize the best interests of each community....Venice marks the beginning of a new day in city planning not only for Florida, but also for all the country."

"The city is being built with a foresight running far into the future. The street and sidewalk system has been laid out and is being constructed in a manner to permit consistent and continuous expansion as the years roll on; the schools are placed in most convenient spots, from which, as a logical nucleus, the system of structures can be carried on in the future; the drainage system has been figured not only to take care of the heaviest demands of the present, but also to meet increased requirements for years to come; the park system has been planned for an indefinite future, as well as for present needs -- in short, Venice is laid out to take care of at least two generations yet to come, as the need progressively arises."

The above description would normally be considered promotional and embellished, but it is consistent with the plans as adopted and used by the developers of the town. Another aspect of Nolen's planning philosophy was the development of nearby support activities such as dairies and farms. The farms were intended to provide fresh vegetables, meat, milk, eggs, and other produce to the nearby community. This system of farms would form a greenbelt around the community to limit growth and provide for recreational greenspaces. The Venice plan was a regional plan in every sense of the word. It covered twenty-four square miles and stretched eight miles inland from the beach. The provision for these farms would in effect result in a completely independent community where industry and agriculture would provide adequate employment for the town's residents. It was not Nolen's premise that this town would be a resort community, but a viable, functioning community with diverse industry.

The National Conference on City Planning met in May, 1926 in Florida. This meeting prompted the call for a symposium of city planners working in

Florida to comment on what the nation could learn from development in Florida and what suggestions they could offer Florida officials. Nolen's response was at the top of the list published in the June edition of The American City. Some of his suggestions were that local planning should make provision for adequate open spaces, public buildings, schools, etc., even though they were not generally publicly owned. This was very similar to approaches in several current local comprehensive plans. He urged planning to be associated with a developer or legal provisions for its implementation should be used. His recommendations to Floridians were: adopt plans and local zoning, develop a comprehensive state plan, develop architectural themes for continuity and identity, and have public ownership of the waterfront. His final and most important recommendation was for the provision of community diversity in population: "Efforts should be made to attract all sorts of desirable citizens and not merely the wealthy. Provision should be made in cities and in the country for all classes, especially for labor." He noted Venice was the best example of making provision for "all classes."

John Nolen's contribution to American planning was very important in his demonstration that social change could be accomplished through planning. His concern for basic human needs and his feeling everyone should benefit from planning and good design was the hallmark of his work. John Hancock, a biographer of John Nolen, summed up Nolen's career in this way:

"Nolen pioneered the importance of public participation and cooperation, civic surveys, and legislation as a basis for planning, capital budgeting, the establishment of planning as a governmental function, comprehensive coverage and continuous programming, decentralization, especially through new town and regional planning."

Nolen's influence in Florida can be found in many communities, but none more than Venice. Although the development of the city ground to a halt in the 1930s through a combination of the Depression and over-extension on the part of its developers, the basic plan has been followed. Venice provides a useful lesson on how a good community plan and a community's willingness to follow it can provide a future to subsequent generations. This is the basic value and importance of Venice: the physical legacy of town planning in America.

PROMOTION OF VENICE

The marketing of the development was handled by the Venice Company. The company was headed by a Mr. Carpenter who had worked for the Coral Gables Development Company. Salesmen were recruited and offices opened in New York, St. Petersburg, Fort Myers, Punta Gorda, Lakeland, Orlando, Clearwater, and Jacksonville. Meetings were scheduled in these and other cities through local

representatives. Publicity packages were aimed at getting prospective investors to local meetings where introductory films were shown of the development. Promotions included direct mail, newspaper ads, window cards, and special stories. Local union officers and members of the ladies' auxiliary were considered primary contacts to induce potential investors to the meetings. Local bankers and civic clubs were also considered good contacts, as were members of the local Izaak Walton League and other fishing clubs. The agents were supplied with prepared speeches, registration cards for prospective buyers, and ready-made ads for use in local newspapers.

Every resource of high pressure selling was invoked to stimulate the sale of property. Extensive and intensive advertising was employed. Descriptive literature, books, pamphlets, and pictures were made and widely distributed. Special writers and publicity men were secured, moving pictures were made and shown in the Florida picture houses. Buses, automobiles, and boats were purchased and sent to transport people to Venice. Parties were organized in Venice and entertainment provided.

At the same time Venice was experiencing steady growth, the Florida Land Boom was faltering. A nationwide skepticism brought on by bad press, the hurricane of 1926, and overspeculation all combined to deter new investors. Venice, like other fledgling communities, faltered. Although construction figures were impressive, they were well behind estimates. Stanton Ennes, general manager of the BLE Real Estate Company, noted in 1926 the "response was disappointing." The developers looked for a solution to boost lagging sales, and found it in two areas which were common to Florida developments of the day.

The first of these was easy financing. The union did not undertake its own housing construction program, but encouraged outside builders. Builders were offered the opportunity to purchase lots with 25% down and were given a loan equal to two-thirds of the value of the building and the lot. Many builders were able to get the appraisal of their proposed buildings inflated so they could secure loans to cover their original down payment. This situation encouraged speculative building and is regarded as the main reason houses were built in Venice. Many times a builder did not have to put up any of his own money and could sell his house at a clear profit.

The second tactic was to convince the prospective investor that the Union was behind the development. It is clear that, while special corporations were set up to shield the BLE itself from the risk of development, all publicity about the project centered around the Union's involvement. Statements from its officers were secured boasting the Union and its full financial resources were behind the development. Fortunately for Venice, but not for the union executives, this was an accurate picture.

Unlike less successful Florida real estate deals, Venice had streets, sewers, and other amenities under construction and completed by the Union. This involved an investment of over $16 million by the end of 1927. By the end of 1927, however, the development had lost over $9 million and prospects for the future were unclear.

PERIOD OF GROWTH
Architectural Design

As Venice began to take shape as a community, a definite feeling and character was established. This was the result of design review requirements set forth in all deeds stipulating the use of the Mediterranean Revival style in the plans for the building. The New York firm of Walker and Gillette was the supervising architectural firm given power by the Union to approve all design work prior to construction. The design requirements stipulated all construction would be in a "Northern Italian" design. This architectural style is more commonly called Mediterranean Revival style.

A thematic design concept was common in many planned communities in Florida during the Land Boom Period of the 1920s. It effectively establish unique character and individuality to a community. The design standards for Venice included the use of sloping roofs with colored tile and smooth stucco. The designs were generally simple with limited ornamentation. Awning colors were regulated since they were, in many cases, the only color on the houses. Window and door placement were also regulated as was the setting of the building.

The designs for the first buildings in Venice were provided by several architects. Harrison Gill of Tampa designed the Boissevain and Lawton Buildings. Gill was the first architect to open an office in Venice. Guy Johnson Davenport of Ft. Myers designed the Nickels Building in 1926 and E. W. Darling designed the Estes Building. Walker and Gillette were responsible for designing the major buildings such as the Venice Hotel and its annex. J.C. Humphrey of Sarasota designed the Blackburn Block.

Landscape Design

In conjunction with the design elements of the built environment of Venice was that portion of the Nolen Plan addressing the green and open spaces along the wide avenues and boulevards. The City established a Landscape Department under the direction of Prentiss French. Having worked in the Northeast for many years, Mr. French came to Venice on a vacation and stayed on. He headed up a department that, in 1926, numbered fifty employees. Of these, several were individuals experienced in design landscape architecture. F. Paul Horne, in general charge of the nursery and of the actual outside

planting, was for five years the superintendent of the park commission in New Orleans and had charge of the nurseries and an extensive chain of parks in that city. Horne had previously worked for ten years in Oneco, Florida, with the Royal Palm Nursery. Also on staff were H. E. Heller, Ph.D. in landscape architecture from Harvard, and T. O. Ecperman, experienced in the architecture and engineering of designed landscapes.

As referred to above, the Landscape Department included a forty acre nursery with every facility needed as well as a stock of over 250 varieties of plants worth over $50,000. This included citrus trees for Venice Avenue, coconut palms for the front of business buildings and date palms for parking areas. In addition, the nursery included palmetto palms, rubber trees, Royal Poinciana Palms, Jacaranda trees, bouganvilla and flame vines, live oak trees, and native foliage. The Landscape Department was created before even the first curb was installed in the City and was the primary force behind the later construction of the green spaces. Landscapes begun in 1926 were estimated to take three years to complete, given the average time of growth from seedlings to mature trees and plants.

Development

A key feature of the Venice development was the plaza area along Venice Boulevard. The original plan called for a 200-foot boulevard with a 100-foot parkway in the center terminating in a plaza. The street was to serve as the gateway to Venice Beach. On June 10, 1926, the first street in Venice, Nassau Street, was opened. By mid-June, the project's first phase was complete, with six miles of streets graded and a mile of seven-foot sidewalks and gutters completed. Venice Avenue was paved while crews worked around the clock to build a road east of town to the area where small acreage farm sites were on sale.

The opening of the development was set for February 26, 1926, with Governor John Martin attending. Special trains from Orlando, Tampa, St. Petersburg, and other Florida cities were chartered to bring in prospective investors. Buses were available for visitors and space was provided for an expected 1000 cars. The Venice Bathing Pavilion was opened to the public and the beach was dotted with beach chairs and umbrellas for the bathers.

The Hotel Venice opened on June 15th. It was described as a modest structure with "large windows, ventilating doors and ceiling fans." The hotel boasted its own ice machines, laundry, bake shop, and barber. There were 100 rooms with private baths and a fire sprinkler system. The dining room was a large room with a beamed cypress ceiling, terrazzo floor, and diagonally checked walls in Verde antique and white. The lobby also had a cypress beam and plaster ceiling.

The first commercial building on Venice Avenue was started in May by E.F. Boissevain at Venice Boulevard and the Rialto. The building was to house two stores on the first floor and a billiard hall on the second. It was designed by R.J. Stehm, an architect with Hare and Clark of Tampa. In July, 1926, the Burgundy Building was begun. Designed by Gill and French, a Tampa firm with offices in Venice, the structure contained ten apartments, five stores, four offices, and a filling station. It was designed in the "flat iron" configuration. In the same month, H.E. Sanders of Tampa started construction on a drug store, barber shop, and clothing store. The building was designed by W. H. Schumaker of Tampa, who was also the architect of several structures on Davis Island in Tampa.

The industrial section of town was also growing, as several plants were built to support the construction projects. The first industry was a tile plant which produced clay building tiles, floor tiles, and concrete block. The Sherman Concrete Pipe Company of Knoxville, Tennessee, established a plant to manufacture pipe for water and sewer construction. The Edelbut Plumbing Company also established a store in the city to supply the builders.

Public facilities were started in June and July of 1926. The water system was first installed in Gulf View, the central portion of the town, and in the industrial section. Work was begun to deepen Casey's Pass to make Roberts Bay more accessible to boats. Five tennis courts and the golf course were begun and Peninsular Telephone Company commenced the installation of Venice service. Plans were proposed for a school house in Venice and the issue was put to the local voters for approval. The original railroad alignment was moved to the east to place it more in keeping with the master plan. Prentiss French, project landscape architect, supervised the installation of trees and shrubs along the parkways and in the parks.

Residential construction started in July, 1926 with the construction of three large residences in Gulf View. These large houses, located on Venice Avenue, were the most extensive to be built in the town. At the same time, five moderately priced houses designed by M. M. Gleichman of Tampa were announced in the Edgewood section. A few days after that announcement, thirty houses were announced for construction in Edgewood with a combined value of $135,000. Construction activity continued as more residences and business blocks were constructed. In October, construction of the San Marco Hotel was announced. The hotel was to be a three-story, 92-room building of steel and concrete block construction designed by noted Tampa architect Franklin O. Adams.

By November, 1926, 68 building permits had been issued with a total value of $2,200,000. One hundred ninety-one buildings, totaling $3,160,000

were completed by the end of that year. In December, the City of Venice was chartered and incorporated. The same month, the adjacent community of Edgewood petitioned to be annexed into the City of Venice.

It was reported in January, 1927 that 128,065 feet of sidewalk, 14,195 feet of sewer, 83,563 cubic feet of paving, five miles of electric lines, two miles of street lights and 21 miles of drainage ditches were completed. Streets in Venezia Park, Gulf View and Edgewood Estates were being paved, totaling 17.9 miles.

By February, 1927, the commercial/retail section of Venice was very active. Local merchants included the Venice Pharmacy, Silva and Sheeley Grocers, Dawson Furniture Company, Howard Electrical Company, and the Rendezvous Tea Room. In February, 1927, J.T. Hardware opened, A.L. Meares opened the first men's clothing store, the Nichol Building opened with the Blates Ready to Wear Shop and the Ware Five and Ten Cent Store, and the new Post Office arcade opened with George B. Prime Hardware, Roth's Venice News Stand, and the Venice Barber Shop.

Social clubs and sporting activities were established to encourage community feeling and provide activities for residents. By mid-1927, a number of civic clubs were organized including the Woman's Club of Venice-Nokomis, Civitan Club, American Legion Venice Post No. 44, Optimist Club, and Boy and Girl Scouts. Local businesses organized several groups to promote their interests, including the Venice Chamber of Commerce and Venice Merchants Association.

Sports and recreation were by far the most popular pastime. The Izaak Walton League (Venice Chapter), Venice Tarpon Club, and the Surf Casting Club were organized for fishermen. There was also an archery club, baseball league, yacht club, and golf club. Venice had varied sporting facilities for the residents, including four clay tennis courts, a baseball field, and a golf course. Water sports were favored, and the Bathing Casino had bathing suits and lockers for rent. An outdoor gymnasium was provided for children and adults. The Venice Yacht Club had docking space, and several Lipton-type racing sloops with motor boats and canoes were available. The civic center area at the center of town consisted of a playground with swings and slides, paddle tennis, horseshoe court, clock golf course, archery range, and a band pavilion.

AGRICULTURAL PLANNING IN VENICE

In July, 1927, the Venice Company began marketing five to ten-acre tracts of land east of town for farming. This was part of the comprehensive plan and was advertised as "the richest muck soil in Florida." To Nolen, it

provided a broad economic and social base to the new town of Venice. Nolen predicted Venice would be a "farm city" including resident farmers "looking for this 'road to independence', freedom from drudgery, a chance to apply business methods, an opportunity to improve their living conditions, and at the same time to increase their earning power." A 40-acre demonstration farm and a 160-acre dairy farm were established to educate the farmers expected to purchase these farm tracts and raise produce to market in nearby cities. Produce could be shipped north via the railroad, overland, and by water from the port which was being dredged by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Promotional brochures promised: "Venice farmland is far greater than in any other place in the United States" and claimed local farmers were routinely earning $500 to $1000 per acre. The land was offered for one-fourth down and four equal yearly installments at 7% interest. They claimed farmers could earn eight times their usual profit on Venice farms with two or three crops a year.

ECONOMIC DECLINE

Indeed, rapid development produced a town of 4000 from a community of less than 100 a year earlier. By 1927, there were 188 residences, 141 apartment units and 83 stores. There were 13.5 miles of hard surfaced roads and 5.5 miles of graded roads. Even so, the growth of the development was slow and far behind projections of the union. Sales dropped steadily in 1926 from $500,000 in January to $101,350 in June. It returned to the January level in November, but steadily declined to a low of $50,000 by December, 1927. Every aspect of the project was operating at a loss during the two-year period including the golf course, three hotels, and the dairy farm.

Controversy surrounding the management of the union's investments and banking activities surfaced at the July, 1927 annual convention. Poor performance of the banks and problems with Venice prompted the membership to vote a "lack of confidence" in the leadership. The union voted to place its financial affairs in the hands of the Board of Financial Trustees. The trustees visited Venice in August and were faced with demands from farmers, whose crops failed in 1926-27, for refunds of their money. They insisted the property was not up to the claims made in advertising. C.H. Huston, former Secretary of Commerce in the Hoover Administration, was hired as counsel and recommended out-of-court settlements.

In September, 1927, Stanton Ennes was hired at a salary of $1,000 per month in an effort to salvage the development. He inherited a community beset with errant mortgagors, unhappy tenants, and slow sales. Development work had stopped and only two out of the five hotels were open. Stores, houses, and apartments were vacant. Many people were holding back principal and interest payments due to a lack of faith the company would complete the development.

Merchants moved out of stores due to lack of sales. Throughout 1927 and into 1928, Ennes continued to report problems with late payments on loans and angry residents. He appealed to his supervisors to develop promotional activities to attract residents and buyers. Ennes estimated 3,750 winter residents would be needed to stabilize the development. There was housing for only 2,000. He also reported the farms had been a disappointment and would require reorganization.

The small-acreage farming development proved to be a bad investment for most Florida developers. It was not understood that small subsistence and vegetable farms in Florida could not support a family. Although this concept was part of the economics which had made Venice appear to have great potential as a town, the farming effort failed. The small farms had drainage problems, marketing problems, and production levels well below the amount needed to sustain the families living on them.

Ennes estimated the average farmer invested over $12,600 in a new farm, including stock, land, house, and equipment. He figured it would cost a farmer $4,850 a year to operate, requiring an average income of $400 per acre. He concluded the small farms were indeed a bad investment. The type of land in Florida and the types of crops grown required large acreage for economical production.

By October, 1927, the union had sold only 1,561 acres with only 115.56 acres plowed and disced. In 1927, the total crop acreage for the farms was 295. The farms participated in the cooperative marketing programs of the Manatee Growers Association. Such small production provides a vivid picture of the farming situation which resulted in the union's having to repossess hundreds of acres of farms. In December, 1927, Ennes ordered the demonstration farm closed and replaced his farm superintendent.

At the end of 1927, Ennes reported the development was making little progress and the union should "do either less or more." He argued the development would fail unless a major effort were made to turn a profit. The interest in Florida real estate had waned. The best they could hope for was to hold on until things improved. The only hope Ennes could see was to capitalize on winter visitors. He estimated the union hotels had 250 rooms available and another 120 were available in privately owned hotels. There were 188 houses and 141 apartments running at a 57% occupancy rate and only one hotel open. With that type of available space, Ennes hoped an advertising campaign would bring tourists to town if activities could be generated at the theater, golf course, and other recreational areas. At mid-winter, he noted, it was very late to undertake such a campaign. He called for such action for several months with little or no response from corporate headquarters in New York.

Limited progress for the development was made in January, 1928. Of the 72 houses in Gulf View and Venezia Park, 44 were rented, 18 were for sale, and 8 available for rent. About half the houses in Edgewood were rented. The San Marco Hotel was opened, however, and offered special packages. Bungalow Court was nearing completion. The mediocre rental market was offset by poor property sales. Only $15,750 in sales were made in the first two weeks of January. Ennes noted that the slow sales were typical of the entire state: "We have had a lot of prospects on the ground, but a disappointingly small percentage of them have been sold. However, I don't believe our situation is any worse than it is generally in Florida."

Employment trouble among union membership also affected Venice. In mid-January, Ennes began dismissing all non-union workers, leaving eleven union men on salary and two earning sales commissions. There was a constant flow of requests for employment from engineers who were out of work and the Venice operation found employment for several of them. An example of this policy was the replacement of the waterworks engineers with union members and the employment of engineers as staff at the San Marco Hotel. This action brought protests from the Steamfitters Union about treatment of their members. The BLE argued it had to care for its own members first.

The month of February showed some improvement over January. Sales exceeded $25,000 with nine additional sales pending. Nine farms and one town lot were resold. Ennes observed the upswing was due to increased hotel occupancy, large numbers of prospects and the presence of "bargain hunters." Ennes also reported the property itself was in good condition. Recent street paving work had been completed and more bonds were being sold to finance additional work. Drainage projects were nearing completion with thirteen miles of main canals and 24 miles of lateral ones. The city telephone system had been established and opened, but work on Bungalow Court had been discontinued. Commercial enterprises did not fare well. One grocery store and a men's clothing store had closed, and there was a threat a book store and drug store would soon close as well.

As with any problem affecting a large number of people, rumors were rampant in Venice in 1928. Ennes cited the continual agitation of disgruntled owners as the cause of an estimated sales loss of $100,000. No doubt some of the rumors cited by Ennes were well founded and painted an accurate picture. Over a dozen lawsuits against the company made for bad press and property owners attempted to prevent the issuance of further bonds for paving and improvements.

Not all publicity about the development was bad, however. Most newspapers during the time supported development and attempted to play down

the problems in their communities. It is, therefore, not surprising that a visit by one of the editors of the Tampa Times in March, 1928 prompted a favorable editorial which describes Venice at that time: "What we found at Venice was surprising. There are more buildings there than we had thought...residences, apartments, business houses and handsome hotels. There are attractive parks there, with spaces reserved all over for park purposes."

Good editorials and stop-gap measures only put off the inevitable: the closing of the development. In March, 1928, Stanton Ennes was fired by the union under the accusation of mismanagement and gambling with union funds, not paying bills from 1927, being behind on payroll, giving away assets of the corporation, and refusing to pay interest on his own debts to the company while drawing his $1,000 per month salary. The intervention of one of the trustees resulted in immediate steps to reduce costs and activities. The payroll was immediately cut from $52,000 to $25,000, and farm operations were curtailed. The BLE had little choice but to suspend its operations and shut down the Venice development. A report in April, 1929 indicated the development was all but closed and the union would not continue making improvements.

RECENT HISTORY

The situation was bleak in Venice during the early 1930s. City employees went unpaid and street lights were turned off for lack of revenue. Most of the unsold land reverted to Dr. Albee and other creditors in the 1930s. Slowly, however, the town began to pull itself up. In 1932, the Kentucky Military Institute bought the Venice Hotel and the San Marco Hotel as a winter school for its cadets. Although, the institution did not increase city revenues due to its educational tax exemption, the 300 students and faculty provided much needed income for the few remaining merchants. The following year, Dr. Albee purchased the Park View Hotel and established the Florida Medical Center in Venice. He assembled a medical staff and the Center developed into a successful teaching hospital.

World War II had a major influence on many Florida cities, including Venice. Training bases were established in many parts of the state. Vacant land south of Venice was acquired by the U.S. Government in May, 1942, and the 27th Service Group was relocated to Venice from McDill Field in Tampa. In June, 1943, the 13th Fighter Squadron, 53rd Fighter Group was transferred to Venice from Fort Myers. Later the 14th Fighter Squadron also was moved to the field. They were operational training units for combat fighter pilots and ground crewmen. The Florida Medical Center was initially made available for use by military personnel in September 1942; eventually, it was taken over for the exclusive use of the military. The base helped to bring the community out

of its economic slump, beginning with 900 men and eventually growing to 4000 with over 200 buildings.

The post-war boom also brought prosperity to Venice. Developments in the 1950s produced a new boom with thousands of lots being sold and developed. Population increased in the 1950s and 1960s and hundreds of houses were built. Unlike many Florida cities at that time, Venice had a plan. The actual street plan of the southern portion of the city did not specifically follow the layout of the Nolen plan, but kept to it generally and development did not take place in a disorganized fashion.

F. Associated Property Types

I. Name of Property Type _____

II. Description

III. Significance

IV. Registration Requirements

[XX] See continuation sheet

[XX] See continuation sheet for additional property types

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

XX See continuation sheet

H. Major Bibliographical References

XX See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- [X] State historic preservation office
- [ ] Other State agency
- [ ] Federal agency
- [ ] Local government
- [ ] University
- [ ] Other

Specify repository: Bureau of Historic Preservation

I. Form Prepared By

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F.1

I. BUILDINGS OF VENICE, FLORIDA 1925-1928

II. DESCRIPTION

The general style of the buildings constructed during the period of 1925-1928 is Mediterranean Revival. The consistency in style was the result of architectural standards enforced by the Venice Company during the development period. The majority of the designs in Venice are not elaborate, but are simple, functional buildings which have generally maintained their basic integrity. There are, however, a small percentage of structures that are in the vernacular style of the period. These are stuccoed structures and clapboard and shingled wood frames. These are generally found in the Edgewood Subdivision, as the smaller, more modest houses of workers.

The majority of buildings constructed are of hollow clay tile, manufactured at a local factory (demolished) with a small number of wood framed buildings. Both types of construction are finished with smooth or rough cast stucco. The majority of the structures have poured concrete foundations although there are some exceptions that have raised foundations resting on brick piers. The buildings feature a variety of roof shapes, from hipped and gabled to flat with a parapet. Hip roofs often connect with a gabled structure, connected to a shed or flat projection. Crenellated parapets are common in areas such as the apartment houses on Armada Street. Clay barrel tiles are almost universal for all sloped roof surfaces. Flat roofs are finished with rolled composition or asphalt shingles. The use of flat roofs is generally limited to small wings or garages. Roofs have little or no overhang.

Arched windows and doors are an important element in the character of Venice architecture. Original double-hung or casement windows have frequently been altered with jalousie or aluminum awning replacements. Remaining windows are wood and steel in a variety of forms, including French doors, Palladian windows, single and double hung sash and casement. Ornamentation includes applied plaster or concrete relief medallions and cartouches, embedded glazed polychrome terra cotta tiles, balconies, and carved wooden brackets. Doorways are often elaborate with classical archivolt trimand keystones. Stucco is often applied in an ornamental pattern providing a rich texture. Chimneys appear on the exterior elevations, embellished with inlaid terra cotta tiles or niches. The chimneys are often capped, some with elaborate pointed arches.

The interiors of residential buildings include beamed cathedral ceilings, ceramic tile floors, and ornamental details. Many details, such as inlaid terra cotta tile, were imported from Tunisia and Spain. Such architectural features as arched doorways and engaged columns are found in even the most modest of structures.

F. II.
A. HOUSING FACILITIES

Following the comprehensive nature of the plan, a variety of housing opportunities were provided in Venice. The plan addressed lot size, density, income, and, as implemented by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, architectural style. The Venice Company's price schedules depict the values placed on the individual lots and the intensity of development which would be permitted. Four districts identified during the survey provide a good illustration of the variety of housing types allowed for in the Venice plan.

1. Large-sized Residences

Located within the boundaries of the Venice Avenue Commercial District, as well as the residential neighborhoods surrounding it, are elaborate Mediterranean Revival residences constructed for the executives of the BLE Union. As prescribed in the Nolen Plan of Venice, the BLE constructed large, elaborate housing for those of the planned community with higher incomes. These structures were built in the most prominent locations, close to the Gulf of Mexico and often on the most prominent of esplandes. These houses reflect Nolen's realization that a community, even a blue collar community, would need to provide for the civic and social elite.

2. Medium-sized Residences

The Venezia Park Subdivision (Historic District) and other areas surrounding it contain medium-sized Mediterranean Revival residences in a park setting. These residential neighborhoods were designed and planned to provide housing for the middle class of the community. This included the management of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the real estate agents and various other members of the community. Consistent with Nolen's plan, the houses were slightly smaller that those for the executives, and were situated on medium sized lots. They were clustered near parks and projected school sites.

3. Small-sized Residences

The Edgewood Subdivision (Historic District) includes more modest residential buildings for low and moderate income groups. The subdivision was developed specifically the clientele for which the BLE had Venice designed and built for. As the development was for the workers that were both looking to relocate to improve their stations in life, and for the retirees that would live on a limited income, it was essential to provide such housing. It was here that the most modest of structures were built. Due to the simplicity of design, they were not only the easiest to construct, but the hardest to impose design controls on. As a result, the houses in the Edgewood Subdivision generally are of such basic Mediterranean Revival style that they are often simply vernacular in nature.

4. Multi-Family Housing

The Armada Road District includes multi-family apartment buildings also in a park setting. Here is one of the features that made the Nolen Plan for Venice unique. In 1925, the concept of apartment living was still foreign to the majority of workers in the United States. Venice, realizing the necessity of providing shelter for relocated families that were already financially strapped, provided for them with multi-family dwellings. Again, a park was incorporated into the plan to allow for the social and recreational needs of the tennants.

B. COMMERCIAL FACILITIES

The commercial area of Venice was developed in a four block area along the eastern portion of Venice Avenue. Development here consisted of two story Mediterranean Revival business blocks and larger hotels such as the Hotel Venice. Banks, general merchandise, and fine shops enjoyed prosperity during the development period, particularly when nearby hotels were filled to capacity. This area is included in the Venice Avenue and Nokomis Avenue commercial districts today.

C. INDUSTRIAL USES

The Venice plan provided for an industrial section located in the eastern portion of the urban area across the Intercostal Waterway. This area was developed primarily for the plants necessary for the construction of the city. A clay tile factory, a mill, and other industrial buildings were included here (all demolished in recent years.) Also located in this section

is the Seaboard Airline Terminal, an individual resource. The terminal's location required the realignment of the existing rail system to accommodate the plan's requirement of locating the facility in the industrial section. The original rail line was incorporated in to Rialto Way (Tamiami Trail-Alternate US-41.)

D. PUBLIC FACILITIES

The plan provided public facilities along the beach, including a bathing casino, amphitheater, boardwalk, shelters, and auto parking. The bathing casino was constructed but was subsequently torn down. Today a contemporary structure provides a public beach pavilion. The plan showed a sense of vision by providing for auto parking at many of its larger public facilities, such as the bathing casino and country club. Although the historic bathing casino has been destroyed, the original areas for these facilities is still in existence and retains its original usage.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BUILDINGS OF VENICE 1925-1928

The original plan for the City of Venice, Florida, included an estimated area of 3.777 square miles. By comparison, the City of Venice presently covers 7.6 square miles. Physically, the plan followed a gridiron arrangement of streets, broken by a few strong diagonal and radial avenues. Venice Avenue provides the main east-west axis, extending from the Gulf of Mexico to the eastern extremity of the city. The major north-south avenue (The Rialto) is today the Tamiami Trail-Alternate US 41. Secondary collector streets include Nokomis, Riviera, Nassau, and Harbor Drive. The southern boundary of the plan was the Corso, intended to make its way through the Golf Course and the Country Club, neither of which fully materialized. The Nolen Plan included a system of rural roads to provide access to the outlying agricultural areas which would contribute directly to the economy of the community.

Today, the City of Venice has developed according to the plan developed and implemented by the Venice Company. Although the industrial section of Venice never quite materialized, the gridiron has developed as it has in the residential and commercial areas. (Please refer to adjoining maps and copies of historic photographs to view the development of Venice over the last half century.)

Each of the building types described in section F. II. was important to the development of the comprehensive town plan for the City of Venice, Florida as designed by John Nolen and implemented by the Venice Company for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Although the Panic of 1929 effectively curtailed the development of Venice, the plan has been implemented and

followed by succeeding generations from the 1930s through today. Each part of the building property type was used to create a community for the blue collar workers and retirees of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The fact that the historic resources and modern infill have successfully been integrated into a viable community, reflects the foresight of city planner, John Nolen.

The comprehensiveness of the Nolen Plan is as effective today in Venice as it was in the 1920s. Today, Venice has grown as a blue collar community and a retirement center. The multiple housing elements of the community have been maintained as has the commercial core. While the industrial center has not materialized according to the Nolen Plan, the historic industrial area does house such facilities as the water treatment plant, industrial warehouses, the train depot (inactive) and the police and fire stations, retaining original use.

IV. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

The properties identified in the 1985 Survey of Venice contribute to the Nolen Plan through integrity of location, design, setting, feeling and association. Because of the nature of the plan, many dwellings were not intended to reflect a high style of architecture.

To be eligible for inclusion under the Venice Multiple Property Cover Nomination, all structures and sites must fall within the limits of the original town plan. They must have been constructed during the period of growth from 1925-1928 and follow the city plan as created by John Nolen and carried out by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Individual structures should conform to the Mediterranean Revival style as indicated by the city's architectural design Review Board during the period of significance. Structures within historic districts need not conform to the design requirements if it is demonstrated that they were constructed between 1925 and 1928. This is to allow inclusion of those modest structures built for the lower-income portion of the city that contain few outstanding architectural details, and to include those structures that have withstood minor alterations, yet contribute to the district.

F.2

I. LANDSCAPE FEATURES OF THE NOLEN PLAN OF VENICE, FLORIDA

II. OPEN (GREEN) SPACES, PARKS, AND PLAN

The plan of Venice is characterized by the provision of many open (green) spaces and parks along its wide boulevards and in its residential areas. It was envisioned that no house would be more than a block or two from a large park. All lots fronted streets that were planned with landscaping or landscaped medians. These green spaces, along with Mediterranean Revival style buildings, distinguish "planned" Venice from later areas of development.

The Venice Avenue Promenade includes a wide planted median connecting the city's commercial core to the Gulf. Park Boulevard and Harbor Drive also include wide planted medians. Large, field-type parks such as Venezia and Menendez Parks are intact, as provided by the plan. Venezia Park is a trapezoidal-shaped space framed by the intersection of Palermo, Nassau, Salerno, and Sorrento Streets. It is lined by large Mediterranean Revival residences built during the development period. Today the park is lined with mature Australian pines planted during the initial period of growth, 1925-1928. Menendez Park differs from Venezia Park through its location in the midst of the multi-family residential area designated by Nolen's plan.

The green spaces and parks of Venice were designed and executed through the Landscape Department of the City of Venice. The city nursery provided citrus trees; coconut and date palms, Royal Poinciana Palms; rubber and palmetto plants; Jacaranda trees; bouganvilla and flame vines; live oak trees; Australian pine; long leaf native pine; and numerous native and exotic foilage.

Several green spaces provided for in the Nolen Plan did not materialize during the initial period of growth. These included two school areas designated on the original map-one located between Venezia Park and Menendez Park, the other located at the Intercostal Waterway across from the industrial section of town. Today, the former site contains a community center and an adjacent city park.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF LANDSCAPE FEATURES OF THE NOLEN PLAN

The original plan for the City of Venice, Florida, included an estimated area of 3.77 square miles. By comparison, the City of Venice presently covers

7.6 square miles. Physically, the plan follows a gridiron arrangement of streets, broken by a few strong diagonal and radial avenues. Venice Avenue provides the main east-west axis, extending from the Gulf of Mexico to the eastern extremity of the city. The major north-south avenue, The Rialto, is today called Tamiami Trail. Secondary collector streets include Nokomis, Riviera, Nassau, and Harbor Drive. The southern boundary of the plan was the Corso, intended to make its way through the Golf Course and the Country Club, neither of which fully materialized. The plan also included a system of rural roads to provide access to the outlying agricultural areas which would contribute directly to the economy of the community. Today, these roads have been asphalted and are now part of the urban built environment.

The green spaces provided for in the Nolen Plan were designed and executed by Prentiss French and the Landscape Department of the City of Venice. These green spaces were so vital to the development of Venice that no curbs, sidewalks or streelights were constructed or placed without the approval of the Landscape Department. This encompassed everything from the benches along Venice Avenue to the Australian Pines in Menendez Park. These designed landscape features were to distinguish designed Venice from later development.

IV. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Landscape Features identified in the 1985 Survey of Venice contribute to the Nolen Plan through integrity of location, design, setting, feeling and association. Because of the nature of the plan, many of the original elements have remained intact and continue to dominate the landscape of Venice.

To be eligible for inclusion under the Venice Multiple Property Cover Nomination, all green spaces, avenues, and landscape features must fall within the limits of the original town plan. They must have been constructed during the period of growth from 1925-1928 and follow the city plan as created by John Nolen and carried out by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The identified feature must retain the integrity of its original use.

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METHODOLOGY

The survey of Venice, conducted in 1985, identified a physically definable period of significant historic development from 1925 through 1928. There are only a handful of buildings in the City of Venice constructed prior to 1925. The collapse of the development in 1928 resulted in a break in the architectural development of the city. Combined with the stagnant Depression Era in which current facilities were used and few new structures constructed, the criteria for selecting properties to be included in the survey was a construction date of pre-1930. Using that criteria, approximately 120 structures from the 1925-1928 historic period were identified.

The survey consisted of field work where all pre-1930 buildings were photographed and architectural descriptions recorded. The history of each residence was assembled from the historical notes developed by the Survey Committee, volunteers, and from the indexes to the newspapers, The Venice News and This Week in Venice. The extensive collection of records on the Venice development were examined and a synopsis of the development's history was compiled from the records.

Florida Master Site Forms (Florida's inventory of historic resources) were compiled, photographs of historic structures were taken by the county historian, and maps were developed by the City of Venice. In addition, a history of each historic structure was compiled by volunteers. The use of questionnaires to property owners was invaluable in locating all existing contributing structures.

Once the historic resources of Venice were identified, a survey map was constructed to reveal the density of dwellings from the historic period. Several large sized, medium sized, and smaller sized residences as well as all the multi-family dwellings constructed from 1925-1928 were identified. A more detailed analysis was conducted of the historic commercial dwellings as they had withstood more alterations over the past fifty years. Potential districts were initially identified, and individual sites potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places were noted.

Modern infill separating historic districts and individual properties from the period of significance is of negative impact to the original plan in only a few instances. These areas include several high-rise condominiums south of Venice Avenue on the Gulf of Mexico and new commercial structures along Alternate US 41, also known and listed in adjoining maps as Tamiami Trail. The remaining modern infill is of similar scale and setback to the

historic construction. Architectural controls implemented by the developers during the 1920s were relaxed in the 1930s as the City sought to stimulate the economy in any way possible. Development, therefore, followed those vernacular styles common to West Florida at that time.

The initial survey also included an archaeological component which was completed during the summer of 1985. The systematic sampling of the entire survey yielded no identifiable prehistoric resources. A review of the literature indicated that pre-Colombian populations most certainly utilized the area; however, no artifacts were found, probably due to the fact that much of the land area was filled to create the community of Venice. Historic archaeological resources may be expected in the vicinity of the settler's homes dating to the late 1800s, but no artifacts were retrieved and those areas are not included in the nomination.

Individual Properties and potential districts were presented to the Florida National Register Review Board and were subsequently approved by that board under a Multiple Resource Area Nomination Cover Form. Because of extensive revisions and numerous discrepancies with maps and photographs, the MRA format was revised to the Multiple Resource Nomination Cover. The cover nomination was submitted for preliminary review along with an individual property and a district nomination. After revisions to this following National Register staff comments, the cover and two individual properties were submitted for listing. The rest of the individual sites and districts will be submitted following careful scrutiny for accuracy. This is needed as the length of time and turnover in staff have created inconsistencies in the nominating process.

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