

WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Fall 2025



What a Glorious CRASH They Made:

Musick of the American Revolution

by Richard Franklin Donohue

Thursday, October 30, 2025

7:00 Annual Meeting

7:15 Refreshments

7:30 Musical Performance

Weston Public Library Community Room

Refreshments

All are Welcome

Join us for the “fiery repertoire” of musician and historian Richard Franklin Donohue, Tenor & Harpsichord, who will present songs and hymns published in New England during the Revolutionary War years. From the time of the Stamp Act through the British surrender at Yorktown, seditious colonists used these works to foment rebellion, commemorate victory, and give thanks for preservation. Donohue will present his original research and explore works that, in the words of John Adams, “cultivated the sensations of Freedom.” “What a Glorious Crash They Made” has been performed throughout the region in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.

“A most enjoyable evening of songs beautifully sung and their stories engrossingly told.”

CEMETERY TOUR WITH PAM FOX

On Sunday, October 26th, Pam Fox, president of the Weston Historical Society and author of *Farm Town to Suburb: The History and Architecture of Weston, Massachusetts*, will lead a free tour of the two oldest cemeteries in Weston: Farmers Burying Ground and Central Cemetery, co-sponsored by WHS and the Golden Ball Tavern Museum. Pam will share stories about customs, gravestone artistry, and the prominent people of Weston laid to rest in our town center. The tour will include reflections on the Revolutionary War era soldiers who are buried there.

The tour will begin at the Golden Ball Tavern Museum at 2 p.m. Light refreshments will be served following the tour.



Above: Pam Fox at Farmers Burying Ground (Courtesy Golden Ball Tavern Museum)
Below: Gravestone of Ensign John Warren, who died in 1703 and was the first person buried in the newly created Farmers Burying Ground. Note the winged skull motif on the gravestone. (Photo courtesy of Pam Fox)



ANTIQUe HOUSE MOVING NOW AND THEN

In April 2025, developer Mill Creek Residential broke ground on Modera Weston, a 40B rental community of 172 homes and townhouses on a 14-acre site at 751-761 Boston Post Road. The rest of the 62-acre parcel will remain undeveloped. Until the early 2020s, this property — the last remaining working farm in Weston — was called “Woodleigh,” and from 1922 to 1954, “Exmoor Farm.” The Weston Historical Commission worked with the developer to preserve the Mirick-Farnsworth House, originally built around 1721, to be renovated into work-from-home spaces for residents, and the Eleanor Raymond West Wing, built in 1935, to be restored as a rentable guest suite. In May and July this year, the house and wing were moved to a new location closer to Boston Post Road. A timelapse video of the amazing moving process, carried out by Gordon Building Movers, is available on the Mill Creek Facebook page. Also preserved on the property is the handsome 1840 Greek Revival Sibley House, which did not have to be moved and will be used as a leasing office. The adjacent Sibley barn was taken apart and moved to Vermont to be reconstructed. The Woodleigh cottage, barn, and a tenant house known as “Apple Flats” were demolished. The new one-, two-, and three-bedroom flats and townhomes will have an average size of 1,318 square feet. First move-ins are anticipated for summer 2026.

The following article is based in part on the Fall 2012 *Weston Historical Society Bulletin* article “The Aunts of Exmoor Farm,” by Isabella Jancourtz, an extensively researched and footnoted article that can be found on the society’s website: <http://westonhistory.org/data/uploads/bulletins/2012-Fall-Bulletin.pdf>. The author would also like to thank Charlie and Steve Gillespie for information on “Woodleigh,” their family farm from 1955 to the early 2020s.

The Aunts of Exmoor Farm

Is it possible to move a house over an apple orchard? Marion Farnsworth did it in 1935, having decided that she wanted her c.1721 Colonial farmhouse to be located about 575 feet farther back from busy Boston Post Road — but that she did not want to cut down the apple trees. Farnsworth had bought the farmhouse, barn, and outbuildings in 1922, along with 48 acres of meadows, pine forest, and apple trees. Her father, Charles H.

Farnsworth, was the founder and president of First National Stores, so Marion did not lack for funds to develop the property as a “gentlewoman’s farm,” which she called “Exmoor.” This article will focus on the original farmhouse, which was moved back from the road only to be moved again ninety years later to a new location not far from its original site.

In her 2012 article “The Aunts of Exmoor Farm,” Isabella Jan-courtz describes life on this idyllic farm in the years 1922 to 1954. Over the years, Marion and her companion Helen Johnson (“The Aunts”) took in young women in need of a good home, whether they be relatives, children of friends, or others who were lucky enough to be “adopted” into the extended Exmoor family. Although the original farmhouse with additions was big, it was not big enough to house the ever-growing family. In 1935 Marion hired Eleanor Raymond, a successful woman architect at a time when the profession was dominated by men. Raymond supervised the moving and enlargement of the “Big House” and designed other buildings for Farnsworth.

Raymond recalled her work for Miss Farnsworth in her Christmas 1941 “History of Exmoor:”

The most dramatic architectural event was the moving of the main house in 1935; chimneys, appended wings and all, up off its foundations by the side of the noisy road, high over the apple orchard where for days it appeared to hang in space — on through the orchard itself where full grown trees were moved out of its path and replanted with sun shades to protect them from the sun, until it alighted on a new cellar hole that had been prepared for it within the shadow of the pine-wooded slope which afforded a view of the distant north country. Here the old house regained the quiet farm setting which belonged to it and all was serene except for the fact that it was too

small for the size of the Exmoor family. In fact it was only half big enough. The architect’s job was to add as much again in terms of room inside but keep the old farmhouse looking just about the same outside. The job called for a “now you see it and now you don’t” artist. It was great fun playing the part.

In the article “House Once Removed” in the magazine *House Beautiful*, author Ethel B. Power described how the move was accomplished:

. . . a trestle was built to lift the house over the valley. On this it was rolled, a few yards a day. Propulsion was by a winch operated by the motor of a large truck. This trestle was not built like a bridge to span the distance; only enough of it was erected at a time to cover a small part of the journey. When the end of the day’s run was reached, the part behind was taken down and built up again in front. Because there was so little of this supporting structure in place at any one time, the house had all the appearance of being poised in mid-air, or, when it reached the orchard, of perching on the tree-tops.

Five new wings in the Colonial Revival style more than doubled its original size. To keep the new parts subordinate so that the original block of the house might still predominate, the architect placed the wings well to the rear and stepped them down. Very little of them is visible from the front. A broad grass terrace was added in front, bounded by a white picket fence and shaded by newly transplanted elms.

According to the *House Beautiful* article, the cost of moving from foundation to foundation was \$3000. The house was expanded to the north, east, and west. The short north wing was for servants, the east wing included servants’ quarters and a garage, and the west wing was a separate residence.

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Left page: Moving the oldest section of 751 Boston Post Road in May 2025.

*Right page: Moving 751 Boston Post Road in 1935. As described in the *House Beautiful* article, “The house rolled sedately on its way. . . , and so little disturbed that a watchman lived in it during the entire journey.” (Courtesy Sally Farnsworth Blackett)*



Woodleigh in 2019 (Photos by Pam Fox)



House Moving, continued from page 3

The Carter Family and “Woodleigh”

In 1954, Marion Farnsworth sold most of Exmoor Farm to Frank B. Carter Jr. (c. 1907–1991) of Weston, owner of Coombs Motor Company, a Ford dealership in Watertown. For many years Carter had provided most of the vehicles at Exmoor, from Ford trucks to Packards. Jenny Kroll, a long-time friend of Marion’s, recalled that the Aunts “had bought practically all their cars from him and had great admiration and respect for him — and somewhat to their surprise he expressed an interest in buying Exmoor Farm. And so that is what eventually came about.” The Big House, a cottage, and “Apple Flats,” a former henhouse that had been converted for use by staff, were sold to Carter, along with about 48 acres. Forty-one acres, for centuries known as the Jericho Swamp, were given to the Town of Weston and renamed Jericho Town Forest.

The following year, Carter married Lucy Gallup Gillespie (1924–2013), also known as “Polly,” a Vassar graduate who taught school in her early career. She was divorced with two young boys, Charlie (b. 1952) and Doug (b. 1954), when she married Carter, who was a bachelor. The couple named the property “Woodleigh” and developed it as a diversified livestock farm. Lucy was very active with Morgan horses and was a leader for the Weston 4-H

Horse Club for many years. She and Frank also raised Basset hounds and competed with their prized dogs.

Frank continued to run Coombs Motors, and Lucy ran the farm and raised the family, which soon included two more boys, Frank III “Terry” (b. 1957) and Steve (b. 1958). Most of the time they lived in the original front part of the main house, while the rest of the house was occupied by staff, rented, or, for a time, occupied by Lucy’s mother. “It was a fun place to grow up,” recalls Steve. “We were the hired help. One brother was in charge of the sheep. I learned how to milk the cows, which had to be done twice a day. We always had horses and there were sheep all over the place.” The sheep were raised for wool and meat. They sheared them and took the wool to a “wool pool.” Charlie took care of the horses, as many as eight at one point. He was later put in charge of the yoke of oxen, used for plowing and hauling logs. It was one of the last teams of oxen in Middlesex County. The farm had milking cows until about the mid-to-late 1980s, when all but one were sold. Charlie recalls having to be home at 4:30 every afternoon to milk the cows, a chore which interfered with after-school activities. The family had a large vegetable garden. “We all grew up pulling weeds.” Charlie recalls, “and in the spring and fall we were somewhat self-sufficient food-wise.” They also grew hay, mostly for the animals. All four boys graduated from Weston High School.

In 1957, the Carters purchased the Greek Revival Sibley house and barn at 761 Boston Post Road. Carter already owned another Greek Revival house at 820 Boston Post Road at the corner of Love Lane, which he had purchased in 1940 and is now the home of Steve Carter and his family.

Frank Carter sold Coombs Motors about 1986 and died in 1991 at age 83. Charlie joined the Navy after high school, but no.751 was always his home of record. Over the years he lived at times in the main house and cottage. Doug served as a Weston selectman and director of the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation and was still running a sheep operation at Woodleigh until recent years. “Woodleigh” was the last operating farm in Weston “if you count the 25 sheep as a cash crop.” Terry managed the farm in the early 1990s before moving to Vermont. Steve was a Weston firefighter for 35 years and managed the farm after his mother passed away.

Lucy Carter passed away in 2013. High Massachusetts estate taxes and Weston property taxes made it difficult to keep the farm. Charlie mused: “I would have liked to grow old and die there, but that was not going to happen.” The sale was a long drawn-out process with “no viable options,” according to Charlie. “I was sorry to see it happen. I miss the place where I grew up and lived, on and off, for seventy years. I live in a more urban area now and I miss going out at night and seeing the stars.

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

From Matt Siegel, eight photo albums dating from the 1980s and including photos of Weston High School activities, students, and faculty, taken by his mother Roberta Siegel.

From the late 1970s to the mid 1990s, Roberta Siegel used her camera to document people and activities at Weston High School. She photographed concerts, plays, sports events, graduations, and other activities, plus portraits of students and faculty. Her son Matt has donated seven photo albums compiled in the years 1983 to 1989 and an eighth album documenting school plays, probably also dating to the 1980s. Matt recalls that his mother took her rolls of film to Jet Photos in Waltham, which developed the pictures within hours. She would come into school at 6 am the next day and post them in a glass case in the hall. Students crowded around the case to see the latest images. Matt described her as “the social media” of her day — “Instagram before Instagram.”

From the Weston Estates homeowners, Weston Estates sign, dating from the late 1960s or 1970s.

Weston Estates is a neighborhood straddling the Weston-Wayland town line developed beginning in the 1960s by the A.J. Comeau Construction Company, the first builders in Weston to specialize in custom houses for high-end clients. Ernest Comeau later wrote: “We sacrificed land at the entrance to give the area a more prestigious entrance.” “My daughter Christine designed a beautiful sign. . . . [It] was right on Route 20 at the Weston/ Wayland town line and was a fantastic marketing tool.” In 2025, the neighborhood association decided to replace the aging sign, now some 50 years old. The decision was made to make a more durable version of the iconic design, rather than replacing it with a new design. Nichole Gibson and Molly Varnau helped

facilitate the moving of the original heavy metal sign to the Weston Historical Society. For a complete account of the development of Weston Estates, see the Spring 2013 *Weston Historical Society Bulletin*: westonhistory.org/data/uploads/bulletins/2013-Spring-Bulletin.pdf

From Terrie Cornell of Fort Collins, Colorado, an 18th century silver pitcher and three 18th century pewter platters.

The silver pitcher is inscribed with the name “Almira Brown” and “Weston.” Included in the gift is the original will of Thomas Brown, dated 1847, leaving his real estate and personal possessions to his daughter Almira. What is particularly notable about the will is the complete inventory of items



Above: Pewter platter, one of three given to WHS by Colorado resident Terrie Cornell, along with a silver pitcher.



Above: Molly Varnau, member of the Weston Historical Society Board and resident of the Weston Estates neighborhood, helped with transporting the sign to WHS.

included in the bequest, including furniture, “plate” and china, carpets, a looking glass, and even the wooden barrels and firkins in the cellar.

From Betsy Rafuse, an 18th leather pouch, musket balls, and pistol shot.

According to family history, these Revolutionary War-era items belonged to Bartholomew Trow (Jr), born in 1736 in Charlestown. During the Revolutionary War, Trow was a Boston Tea Party participant and fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill. He and his wife Mary had at least seven children including Joanna, who married Atherton Tucker in 1796. The donated items came to the donor through the Tucker family.

From Sarah Jaggar, three Civil War letters and other items.

The three letters from Samuel Patch of Weston to Alonzo Fiske, dated January and July 1863 and October 1864, join others in the WHS collection transcribed in the Spring 2012 *Weston Historical Society Bulletin* beginning on page 30. (westonhistory.org/data/uploads/bulletins/2012-Spring-Bulletin.pdf). Patch was a married 25-year-old carpenter when he enlisted in 1862 in Weston’s first quota of 17. He rose quickly from Private to Captain and participated in many battles described in his excellent letters.

From Meg Kelley, Records of the Weston Land Trust from 1991 to 2011.

The Weston Land Trust (WLT) was formed in 1991 to consider ways to preserve the 60+ acre Case Estates, which Harvard’s Arnold Arboretum had decided was no longer central to its mission. In December 2011, WLT merged with Weston Forest & Trail Association to strengthen the shared mission of protecting and promoting Weston’s open space resources.

WESTON PUBLIC LIBRARY: AN EVER-EXPANDING SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE



by Bonnie Shao

Bonnie Shao is a Weston resident and junior at The Winsor School. Check out her website: bonnieshaobooks.com

The Weston Public Library has served as a central gathering location for the Weston community since its founding in November 1857. The library was originally located in Weston's first Town Hall, a building that also housed the high school and, later, the fire department. However, it became clear shortly after the opening of the library that this building was much too small to serve the library's intended functions, including its most fundamental purpose of storing books. As of April 1862, the library contained 2,100 books.

According to the library trustees' 1861 report, "[a] library room is not only for delivery of books, but also for social intercourse and friendly greeting;" yet, the library in its original form "does not furnish space for all [patrons] to stand on... much less for any considerable number to sit."

Thus, in 1867, following the Civil War, the west end of the Town Hall was enlarged to create a new "Memorial Hall." This enlargement was well-received by many Weston residents, including the library committee itself, which rejoiced: "We have now a place to which we can take our visiting friends with a commendable feeling of pride, to show them in what estimation a free Library is held by the people of Weston."

However, this renovation proved unable to outlast the library's ever-growing popularity, even after 14-by-32 feet of new shelf space were added in 1881, providing space for 5000 more volumes. In 1889, the trustees determined that the library required even more room than the new addition had offered and proposed either further modifying the Town Hall or constructing a building dedicated entirely to the library. They favored the latter plan, and the town agreed. On February 27, 1894, the town bought a house at the corner of Boston Post Road and School Street for \$7500, with the intention of building a new library there.

Yet, construction stalled for many years — with near-deadly consequences. In the summer of 1894, the Town Hall made a "narrow escape. . . from destruction by fire," and a year later, the trustees urgently hinted that this incident served as a "strong reminder of the importance of providing a safer place for our Library." Still, progress on the project remained minimal. Three years later, the impatient trustees wrote, "there are times when noises from the hall above, (which is in frequent use for dances and public meetings) make quiet reading and study in the Library room impossible." Requesting a new library building in their yearly reports quickly became an "invariable custom" that endured incessantly "for . . . ten years."

Aside from its practical functions, the need for a new library derived also from its status as an important social symbol. In the late 19th to early 20th century, well-resourced libraries symbolized a sophisticated citizenry. As powerful and affluent Boston professionals and businessmen began moving to Weston in increasing numbers, the need to build a new library in order to uphold Weston's image, despite the cost, grew steadily. One such citizen found it "impossible that the Town of Weston with all its culture, intelligence, and wealth, should remain longer content with the present crowded and unsatisfactory quarters for the Library," and emphasized that a new library building would easily become "one of the leading features and most potent attractions of [Weston's] civic life."

Five years later, through the persistent efforts of the town, the library's long-intended relocation was finally realized. At a town meeting on August 24, 1899, the town treasurer received permission to borrow \$40,000 for the creation of the new library, and in November 1899, construction began at last. In 1908, a history of Middlesex County deemed the library "a splendid monument to the culture and refinement of the citizens of Weston."

As the years passed, the Weston Public Library continued to expand. By 1959, its circulation was the highest in the state, and its staff included five full-time and twelve part-time workers,

as well as high school pages. These facts, combined with the growing population of the town, renewed the library's demand for space. In May 1991, a committee assigned to investigate the feasibility of building another entirely new library suggested to a town meeting the possibility of constructing it next to Field School. After four more years of fundraising and planning, the current building was finally erected. The 1899 library has been transformed into the Weston Art & Innovation Center.

Views on Fiction

According to the 1861 catalog, Weston Public Library carried eight genres: Agriculture — which included such riveting titles as *Illustrated Horse Doctor* and *The Mysteries of Beekeeping* — Fiction, History, Juvenile, Religious and Moral, Scientific, and Travel. According to the trustees' report that year, fiction was "more generally read than any other division of the library."

However, while fiction is a modern staple of any avid reader's palette, it has not always been legitimized as a genre of value. The 1861 report also cautioned against the "disproportionate" reading of fiction, claiming that works of fiction "absorb the entire attention, and they debilitate the mind, morbidly excite the sensibilities, and render their devotee nervous and impractical." Such admonitions were echoed ten years later when the trustees argued that "such reading requires no intellectual or moral effort" and results in "moral indolence and emptiness of both heart and brain." This attitude was so prevalent that in 1880, the trustees deemed the fact that fiction was, at that time, experiencing lesser circulation than other genres a "good exhibit; it shows an increased demand for books of a high intellectual order."

These beliefs followed the library across the turn of the century. In 1924, the trustees wrote that while fiction novels were "[t]he class of books most in demand by patrons of the Library...The bulk of them...are ephemeral and forgotten within a few weeks after their publication." They were as unrelenting in their condemnation of fiction as their counterparts had been sixty years prior, calling the majority of fiction novels "vicious" and stating that "none of them are of any permanent value to the Library."

In fact, some trustees even perceived fiction as actively harming the library's scholarship. In 1934, they claimed that "money spent for such books, of no lasting value, must often be taken from the departments of history, biography or reference."

Titles under "Fiction" included those by Dickens, Holmes, Thackeray, Stowe, Hawthorne, Bulwer, and Trollope. Truly astounding is the fact that though such writers as Charles Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne are presently revered as literary giants and analyzed by scholars of literature across the nation, their works were subjected to such controversy in their own time.

Attitudes on the place of fiction have changed drastically since the 19th and early 20th centuries. As Madeleine Mullin, Local History Librarian at the Weston Public Library, explained: "In the past, librarians felt that they were responsible for what people read, and they were encouraging them not to read fiction because they considered that junk." However, Ms. Mullin noted that today, librarians consider this practice to be "a form of censorship." She stated: "Librarians now...are very proud of making the library accessible to everybody, whatever their needs are, and not telling or encouraging them to read certain types of books. That's up to the library patron to decide."

Accessibility

Modern readers might also be surprised to learn that the privilege of borrowing books was originally restricted to patrons age 16 and older. Additionally, at the time of its inception, library hours were much shorter than today: only every other Saturday from 2 to 5 pm and every Saturday night from 7 to 9 pm. This abbreviated schedule was likely less than ideal for contemporary avid readers, but perhaps it framed trips to the library as special events to be anticipated throughout the week.

Fortunately, as time passed, library hours continued to expand. In 1881, library hours included Wednesdays from 1 to 5 pm; and, in 1894, hours were extended to Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday afternoons and evenings. By 1900, the library was open six days of the week. As of 1957, the library was open 60 hours per week; and today, its weekly hours total 69. A victory for all Weston readers!

The Children's Room

From originally excluding Weston residents under the age of 16 to presently boasting a flourishing Children's Department, the Weston Public Library has come a long way.

The children's room was originally located in an alcove in the 1899 building, to the right of the entrance. However, by 1912, its popularity was such that the trustees' report noted: "The capacity of the Children's Reading-room . . . already will not hold all the books it is desirable to keep there nor all the children that desire to read them."

Thus, in 1918, when the Town Clerk abandoned the area under the stacks due to the opening of the new Town Hall, the library seized the opportunity to transform it into a new children's room. In 1922, this room officially opened as the Rosamond Freeman Room.

The Children's Department was highly popular among Weston youth. Due to its expansion, the number of books increased from around 24,000 in 1925 to almost 38,000 in 1935. In addition to providing reading material for young people, the Chil-

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LOOKING BACK

WESTON RESPONDS TO HURRICANE KATRINA

It's been just over 20 years since Hurricane Katrina—the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history—ravaged the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. Alarmed at the devastation, Weston resident Robbie Deitch began filling two tandem trucks with supplies to distribute to evacuees. Inspired by this work, Lenore Lobel wrote an article in the *League of Women Voter's Bulletin*; and in October 2005, the selectmen established the Hurricane Katrina Committee to look for a way for the town to contribute. Searching for a project, the committee came upon Pearlington, Mississippi, where the non-profit Building Goodness Foundation (BGF) was building shelters and planning to build a community center.

Pearlington is a small fishing village of about 2,000 located on the Pearl River about an hour from New Orleans. The storm surge had reached as high as 20 feet there. Many had lost their loved ones and almost every structure had been destroyed. By April 2007, with the help of 185 volunteers from all over the country, Building Goodness Foundation had built 140 12' X 16' wooden shelters. Weston's Hurricane Katrina Committee raised approximately \$100,000 toward the community center.

The Pearlington Recovery Center was dedicated on August 29, 2009, four years after the storm. Lenore Lobel spoke on behalf of the town of Weston and countless residents who had contributed money and volunteer hours. She presented a quilt made by a fifth grade Weston Girl Scout troop under the direction of Karin Ott. At the time of the center's dedication, four weddings, scores of birthday parties and family gatherings, and many town meetings had already taken place there.



The Hurricane Katrina Committee included Lenore Lobel, Chair (left), Sally Currier (right), Robbie Deitch, Elizabeth Munro, Marybelle Cochran, William Saunders, Katie Fagan, Karin Ott, and Beverly Dilaway. (2006 photo courtesy Lenore Lobel)

Library, continued from page 7

dren's Department, much like its larger library counterpart, also helped to bring together and educate Weston's youth community. In 1951, for instance, the trustees commended the Children's Department for hosting classes on library usage for elementary school students and providing programming for high school students seeking to do research. Such programs continue today.

Although the library's location, operations, and philosophies have changed throughout its history, its central aim of educating and uniting the Weston community has remained constant. What are your thoughts on the differences between the library at its founding and the Weston Public Library that we enjoy today?

Select Bibliography

(1) Dedication of Weston Public Library, Weston, Massachusetts. 1995. (2) Fox, Pamela W., *Farm Town to Suburb: The History and Architecture of Weston, Massachusetts 1830–2020*. 2nd ed. Peter E. Randall Publisher, 2020. (3) Ripley, Emma Frances, *Weston Town Library History 1857–1957*. (4) Weston Historical Commission. The Weston Public Library: Symbol of a Cultured Citizenry. 2010. Excerpt in *The Weston Historical Society Bulletin*, Fall 2010. (westonhistory.org/data/uploads/bulletins/2010-Fall-Bulletin.pdf)

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