



Clare West

Also Known As:

Clair West, Claire West

Lived:

January 30, 1879 - March 13, 1961

Worked as:

costume designer

Worked In:

United States

by **Drake Stutesman**

Little information is available on Clare West although she trail-blazed the status of costume designer, costumed classic films, and in 2003 was entered in the Costume Designer Guild's Hall of Fame. Allie Acker alone gives us pre-1915 details, and she finds that, after college, West studied in Paris, becoming an accomplished fashion artist. Edward Maeder (220) starts her career with D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), but all sources agree that she worked for two years on his ancient-to-modern epic *Intolerance* (1916), the first motion picture to period-dress leads and extras. West's exact role is unclear, but it is possible that she supervised all costuming. Clearly her work raised the level of exoticism of screen fashion and separated it from haute couture by making stunning clothing that were wearable only on film, commencing the important demarcation between the two costume modes. In the teens, actors often wore their own clothes and "wardrobe" was a division of the drapery department, which only purchased, rented, or tacked ready-made items. The costume department as such was not de rigueur until the late twenties, but West inaugurated its initial office when, with *Intolerance*, she attained the unprecedented credential of "studio designer," a feat still notable almost ten years later when *Motion Picture* cited it (Calhoun 116-117).

In 1918, Cecil B. DeMille hired Clare West to oversee costumes for Famous Players-Lasky because he recognized that she could "make people gasp" and knew that the new motion picture audience was hungry for larger-than-life clothing. Dressing superstars such as [Gloria Swanson](#), Bebe Daniels, and [Mae Murray](#) with outlandish, sexual elegance, West's career was eagerly watched by contemporary film fan magazines. In 1923, *Screen News* quoted her declaration that Hollywood led Paris in fashion, an opinion shared, by the late twenties, by costume designers Howard Greer and Gilbert Adrian (14). Fashion historian Mulvagh adds that even French couturiere Elsa

Schiaparelli saw Hollywood as in the ascendance (123). West appeared as herself in the film *Hollywood* (1923), a celebrity-studded comedy.

Despite her maverick achievements, Clare West is mentioned rarely, but when she is, words like “dazzling,” “outré,” and “versatile” are commonly used in reference to her designing. Her costumes are exceptional for their extravagant imagination, modern lines, thorough research, and honest rendering. West enjoyed sweeping drapery, tightly wrapped cloth, sumptuous headgear, and ornate beading. DeMille extolled her “lavish hand” (DeMille 1985, 232) as demonstrated by outfits such as the patent leather swimsuit that reflected nocturnal watery light in *Saturday Night* (1922), or the octopus dress and cape designed for Bebe Daniels in *The Affairs of Anatol* (1921). For prehistoric scenes in *Adam’s Rib* (1923), West made twenty-five fur costumes using no stitches (as sewing was unknown to Ice Age tribes), and formed jewelry from real bones, claws, and feathers (Prichard 354).

For several years, West supervised all Famous Players-Lasky studio productions, where many pictures made huge, costly costume demands such as those in *Manslaughter* (1922), where Leatrice Joy’s furs alone were worth over \$100,000. West worked on ten DeMille films including *The Ten Commandments* (1923), devising extensive research files, still used in the fifties, to help create three thousand costumes constructed by over a hundred seamstresses. In 1924, the designer left Famous Players-Lasky and went to First National Pictures, where she exclusively costumed [Norma and Constance Talmadge](#). That year, *Screen News* reports that she made special garments such as Kathryn McGuire’s lingerie with bird-of-paradise fringe trim in Buster Keaton’s *The Navigator* (1924) while working for Joseph Schenck’s organization (13). In 1925 she made thirty-four costumes for Murray in Erich von Stroheim’s Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production of *The Merry Widow* (1925) and, along with designers such as [Lucille](#), Adrian, and Howard Greer, made runway outfits for fashion show sequences in Paramount’s *The Dressmaker From Paris* (1925). After that, her career becomes difficult to follow.

West’s birth and death dates are elusive, and her name is variously spelled (Clair, Clare, or Claire), but Prichard stresses that “Clare” is correct (247). West does not appear in *The Silent Film Necrology* or the *AFI Catalog of Silent Films*; the Brigham Young University Cecil B. DeMille Archives Index does not list her; and the Costume Designer’s Guild has little West information. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science has no obituary, but one of a few clippings cites her 1922 divorce from cinematographer Paul Perry. There is much contradictory information about her, and credits on films with which she was associated are inconsistent. Chierichetti’s biography of director Mitchell Leisen, who started as a costume designer and who apprenticed under West on *Male and Female* (1919), quotes Leisen as saying that he “sweated” alone because West shunned him (1995, 21). The American Film Institute catalog gives Leisen sole costume design credit for *Male and Female* (1925) although Chierichetti accords him only one sequence (the Babylonian scene). The American Film Institute gives Eric von Stroheim and Richard Day costume credits for *The Merry Widow* (1925), but, according to Prichard, the Mae Murray biographer, credits Adrian while both Dorothy Calhoun and Elisabeth Leese credit West (109).

Photoplay declared that the costumes in *Intolerance* (1916) swayed current fashion, a defining characteristic of West's style from the outset (20). She outdid French designers to become the favorite of her era's screen superstars. Her film designs, pushing extremes, were also important contributions to shifts in the wider fashion vanguard, nationally and abroad, and more scholarship is needed to track her invaluable progenitor role in fashion as well as her influence on other film designers.

Bibliography

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Schreier, Sandy. *Hollywood Dressed & Undressed: A Century of Cinema Style*. New York: Rizzoli, 1998.

"That Octopus Gown." *Photoplay* vol. 20, no. 4 (Sept. 1921): 20.

Archival Paper Collections:

Cecil B. DeMille Archives. [Brigham Young University](#), [Harold B. Lee Library](#).

Clare West clippings file. [Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences](#), [Margaret Herrick Library](#).

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Clare West as Costume Designer

The Birth of a Nation/The Clansman. Dir.: D. W. Griffith, sc.: D. W. Griffith, Frank E. Woods, Thomas S. Dixon Jr., cos.: Clare West, Goldstein Co. Los Angeles (Epoch Producing Corp. US 1915) cas.: Lillian Gish, si, b&w, 35mm., 12 reels. Archive: [Bulgarska Nacionalna Filmoteka \[BGS\]](#), [Fondazione Cineteca Italiana \[ITC\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Cinemateca Brasileira \[BRS\]](#), [Cinemateca do Museu de Arte Moderna \[BRR\]](#), [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [Deutsches Filminstitut \[DEW\]](#), [Münchner Stadtmuseum \[DEI\]](#), [Filmoteka Narodowa \[PLW\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [Österreichisches Filmmuseum \[ATM\]](#), [Cinemateca Romana \[ROB\]](#), [Cinémathèque Québécoise \[CAQ\]](#), [Norwegian Film Institute \[NOO\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [Filmoteca Española \[ESM\]](#), [Deutsches Filminstitut \[DEW\]](#), [Svenska Filminstitutet \[SES\]](#), [Harvard Film Archive \[USI\]](#), [Jugoslovenska Kinoteka \[YUB\]](#), [Cinémathèque Française \[FRC\]](#), [Cinemateca Nacional de Angola \[AOL\]](#).

Intolerance. Dir.: D. W. Griffith, sc.: D. W. Griffith, Anita Loos, Frank E. Woods, cost.: Clare West (Wark Producing Corp. US 1916) cas.: Lillian Gish, si, b&w, 35mm., 13 or 14 reels. Archive: [Bulgarska Nacionalna Filmoteka \[BGS\]](#), [Cinémathèque Québécoise \[CAQ\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Svenska Filminstitutet \[SES\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [Münchner Stadtmuseum \[DEI\]](#), [Filmoteka Narodowa \[PLW\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [Österreichisches Filmmuseum \[ATM\]](#), [Cineteca Nazionale \[ITN\]](#), [Fondazione Cineteca Italiana \[ITC\]](#), [Cinemateca Romana \[ROB\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [Filmoteca Española \[ESM\]](#), [Harvard Film Archive \[USI\]](#), [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#), [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [Museo Nazionale del Cinema \[ITT\]](#), [UC Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive \[USB\]](#), [Jugoslovenska Kinoteka \[YUB\]](#), [Anthology Film Archives \[USN\]](#), [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#).

Male and Female. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Jeanie Macpherson, cost.: Clare West (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1919) cas.: Gloria Swanson, si, b&w, 35mm., 9 reels. Archive: [Cineteca Nazionale \[ITN\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Cinemateca do Museu de Arte Moderna \[BRR\]](#), [Filmoteka Narodowa \[PLW\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Jugoslovenska Kinoteka \[YUB\]](#), [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#).

Something to Think About. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, st.: Jeanie Macpherson, cost.: Clare West (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1920) cas.: Gloria Swanson, si, b&w, 35mm, 7 reels. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#)

Why Change Your Wife?. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Olga Printzlau, Sada Cowen, ed.: Anne Bauchens, cost.: Clare West, Mitchell Leisen, Natacha Rambova, (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1920) cas.: Gloria Swanson, Thomas Meighan, Theodore Roberts, si, b&w, 35mm., 7 reels; 7, 175 ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

The Affairs of Anatol/Five Kisses, Anatol. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Jeanie Macpherson, cost.: Clare West (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1921) cas.: Gloria Swanson, si, b&w, 35mm., 9 reels; 8, 806 ft. Archive: [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Münchener Stadtmuseum \[DEI\]](#), [Filmoteka Narodowa \[PLW\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Fool's Paradise. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Beulah Marie Dix, Sada Cowan, cost.: Clare West, Natacha Rambova (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1921) cas.: Conrad Nagel, Dorothy Dalton, Mildred Harris si, b&w, 35mm., 9 reels; 8, 681 ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

Forbidden Fruit. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Jeanie Macpherson, cost.: Clare West, Natacha Rambova, Mitchell Leisen, ar.: Natacha Rambova, Mitchell Leisen (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1921) cas.: Kathlyn Williams, si, b&w, 35mm., 8 reels; 7,804 ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

Manslaughter. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Jeanie Macpherson, Alice D. G. Miller, cost.: Clare West, Paul Iribe (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1922) cas.: Leatrice Joy, si, b&w, 16mm., 10 reels, 9, 061 ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#).

Saturday Night. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Jeanie Macpherson, cost.: Clare West (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1922) cas.: Leatrice Joy, si, b&w, 35mm., 9 reels; 8, 443 ft. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [George Eastman](#)

[Museum \[USR\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#).

Adam's Rib. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc./st.: Jeanie Macpherson, cost.: Clare West (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1923) cas.: Julia Faye, si, b&w, 10 reels; 9, 526 ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#).

Ashes of Vengeance. Dir.: Frank Lloyd, sc.: Frank Lloyd, H.B. Somerville, cost.: Clare West (for Talmadge only) (Norma Talmadge Film Co. US 1923) cas.: Norma Talmadge, si, b&w, 35mm., 10 reels; 9,893 ft. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#).

Bella Donna. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc.: Ouida Bergere, cost.: Clare West (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1923) cas.: Conway Tearle, si, b&w, 8 reels; 7, 895 ft. Archive: [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#).

The Song of Love. Dir.: Frank Borzage, Chester M. Franklin, Frances Marion, sc.: Frances Marion, Margaret Peterson, cost.: Clare West (Norma Talmadge Film Co. US 1923) cas.: Norma Talmadge, si, b&w, 35mm., 8 reels; 8, 000 ft. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

The Ten Commandments. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Jeanie Macpherson, cost.: Clare West (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1923) cas.: Julia Faye, si, b&w, 35mm., 13 reels; 9, 946 ft. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

The Goldfish. Dir.: Jerome Storm, sc.: C. Gardner Sullivan, Gladys Unger, cost.: Clare West (Constance Talmadge Film Co. US 1924) cas.: Constance Talmadge, si, b&w, 35mm., 7 reels; 7,145 ft. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

The Navigator. Dir.: Donald Crisp, Buster Keaton, sc.: Clyde Bruckman, Joseph Mitchell, Jean Havez, cost.: Clare West (for Kathryn McGurie only) (Metro-Goldwyn Pictures Corp. US 1924) cas.: Kathryn McGuire, si, b&w, 16mm., 6 reels; 5, 600 ft. Archive: [Bulgarska Nacionalna Filmoteka \[BGS\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Cinematca do Museu de Arte Moderna \[BRR\]](#), [Svenska Filminstitutet \[SES\]](#), [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [Filmoteka Narodowa \[PLW\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Fondazione Cineteca Italiana \[ITC\]](#), [Cinematca Romana \[ROB\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Filmoteca Española \[ESM\]](#), [Deutsches Filminstitut \[DEW\]](#), [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [Harvard Film Archive \[USI\]](#), [Filmarchiv Austria \[ATF\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Cinémathèque Québécoise \[CAQ\]](#), [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#).

Secrets. Dir.: Frank Borzage, sc.: Frances Marion, Rudolph (Rudolf) Besier, May Edginton, cost.: Clare West (Joseph M. Schenck Productions US 1924) cas.: Norma Talmadge si, b&w, 35mm., 8 reels; 8,363 ft. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

Sherlock, Jr. Dir.: Buster Keaton, Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle, sc.: Clyde Bruckman, Jean Havez, Joseph Mitchell, cost.: Clare West (Buster Keaton Productions, Inc. US 1924) cas.: Buster Keaton, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Harvard Film Archive \[USI\]](#), [Bulgarska Nacionalna Filмотека \[BGS\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Filмотека Narodowa \[PLW\]](#), [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Fondazione Cineteca Italiana \[ITC\]](#), [Cinematca Romana \[ROB\]](#), [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Deutsches Filminstitut \[DEW\]](#), [Svenska Filminstitutet \[SES\]](#), [Museo Nazionale del Cinema \[ITT\]](#), [Jugoslovenska Kinoteka \[YUB\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#).

The Golden Bed. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Jeanie Macpherson, cost.: Clare West (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1925) cas.: Mary Jane Irving, si, b&w, 9 reels; 8, 584 ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

The Lady. Dir.: Frank Borzage, sc.: Frances Marion, cost.: Clare West (Norma Talmadge Film Co. US 1925) cas.: Norma Talmadge, si, b&w, 35mm., 8 reels; 7,357 ft. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

The Merry Widow. Dir.: Erich Von Stroheim, sc.: Erich Von Stroheim, Benjamin F. Glazer, cost.: Clare West (for Mae Murray only) (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp. US 1925) cas.: Mae Murray, si, b&w, 35mm., 10 reels; 10, 027 ft. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Münchener Stadtmuseum \[DEI\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Cineteca Nazionale \[ITN\]](#), [Cinematca Romana \[ROB\]](#), [Filмотека Española \[ESM\]](#), [Deutsches Filminstitut \[DEW\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [Museo Nazionale del Cinema \[ITT\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Jugoslovenska Kinoteka \[YUB\]](#).

The Road to Yesterday. Dir.: Cecil B. DeMile, sc.: Jeanie Macpherson, Beulah Marie Dix (DeMile Pictures Corp. US 1925) cas.: Vera Reynolds, cost.: Clare West, si, b&w, 35mm. 10 reels; 9, 980 ft. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Clare West as Costume Designer

Dust of Desire, 1919; *Arabian Love* (for LaMarr only), 1922; *Flirting With Love*, 1924; *The Dressmaker From Paris* (for Leatrice Joy), 1925.

2. Clare West as Herself

Hollywood, 1923.

C. DVD Sources:

The Birth of a Nation. DVD. (Kino Lorber US 2011)

The Birth of a Nation. DVD. (Eureka Entertainment US 2013)

Intolerance. DVD. (Kino US 2002)

Intolerance. DVD. (Delta Entertainment US 2004)

Male and Female. DVD. (Image Entertainment US 1999)

Male and Female. DVD. (Flicker Alley US 2017)

Manslaughter/The Cheat. DVD. (Kino Lorber US 2002)

The Ten Commandments. DVD. (Paramount Home Video US 2017)

The Ten Commandments: Ultimate Collector's Edition. DVD. (Warner Brothers US 2013)

The Navigator. DVD. (Kino Classics US 2012)

Sherlock Jr. DVD. (Kino International US 2010)

The Merry Widow. DVD. (Warner Archive Collection US 2011)

D. Streamed Media:

[*The Birth of a Nation*](#) (1915) is streaming online via Kanopy

[*Intolerance*](#) (1916) is streaming online via Kanopy

[*Intolerance*](#) (1916) is streaming online via Amazon Prime

[*Intolerance*](#) (1916) is streaming online via the Internet Archive

[*The Affairs of Anatol*](#) (1921) is streaming online via Kanopy

[*Male and Female*](#) (1919) is streaming online via the Internet Archive

[*Manslaughter*](#) (1922) is streaming online via Kanopy

[*The Ten Commandments*](#) (1923) is streaming online via Amazon Video

[*The Ten Commandments*](#) (1923) is streaming online via the Internet Archive

Credit Report

As mentioned in the article, confirming Clare West's credits proves difficult as AFI, Paul Spehr, and FIAF rarely list costume designers. Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss's 1994 book *On Fashion* discusses West's collaboration with both deMille and set designer Paul Iribe and confirms a number of titles. While *The Song of Love* can't be confirmed as a West film, she is listed in a number of sources as dressing all Norma and Constance Talmadge films in the early 1920s.

Citation

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<<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-clare-west/>>