

Setting

ROMEO:

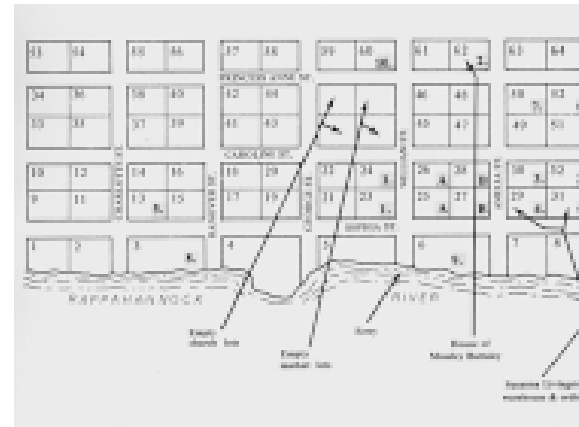
. . .for my mind misgives some consequence yet hanging in the stars shall bitterly begin his fearful date with this night's revels. . .

I.iii.

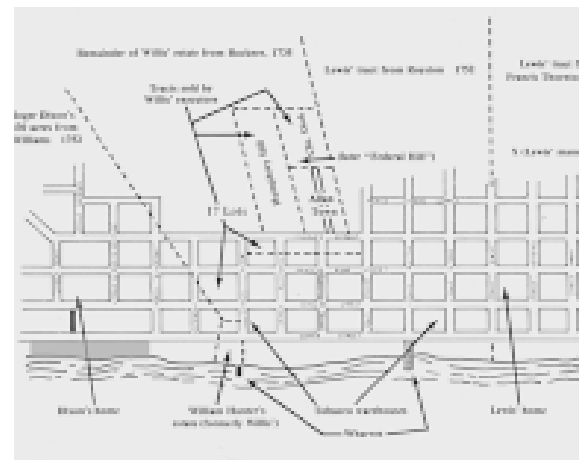
An arrival or departure by boat is a direct way in which the river could become part of the play. As a metaphor, the river denotes a crossing, and in this case, Romeo's crossing into the home of his enemy. Although William Shakespeare's stage directions do not call for a river in *Romeo and Juliet*, the river can be used to enhance the meaning of a play or offer the audience a new level of understanding of the drama. In the twentieth century, set design has moved beyond literal representation of place. It has become a metaphor for the action, or even another actor in the play. A line in the play often tells the audience where a scene is literally taking place, and the audience, in turn, can visualize this reality without a need to see a painted flat on the stage. Instead, an architectural condition which denotes an open space or a closed space or a foreboding space or a pleasant space speaks more of the ideas behind the action. Architecture itself becomes the backdrop for human activity; a built structure has an immediate effect on the site and on people as it either enhances or disrupts existing habits or conditions. Architecture can bring with it a new level of understanding about a place if the site is thought of as a script upon which to build. As the river initialized and set the stage for the town, the project needs to set the stage for the river in a way which will once again give it a presence.



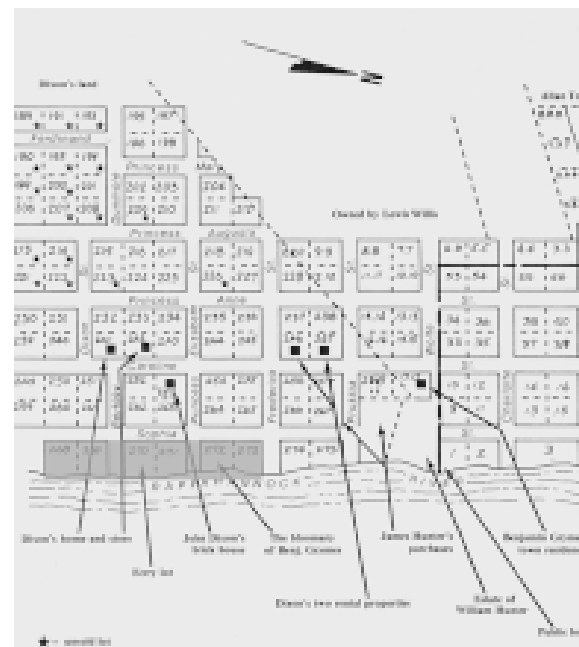
*The riverfront of Historic Fredericksburg*



Fredericksburg, 1730



Fredericksburg, 1759



Fredericksburg, 1771

A place built from a river becomes rooted to the river itself as the river, in turn, links one place to the many along its banks. Fredericksburg grew from the banks of the Rappahannock River, which flows along the eastern border of the city. The city's existence depended upon what the river could supply, and the trade out to the Chesapeake Bay, 108 miles from the city.

The Rappahannock, an American Indian word for "rapidly rising waters", is characterized by its frequent overflows. Until the forty foot contour interval at the top of Sophia Street, the site is in a one hundred year flood zone. Despite the river's temperament, the Manahoacs and the Powhatans were once settled near its banks due to the abundance of fish and wildlife. When Captain John Smith explored the area in 1608, the Indians drove him away and were able to keep settlers off their land until 1721. In 1671, Governor William Berkely had granted a land patent of 2,000 acres to Thomas Royston and John Buckner of Gloucester County. These "Leaselands" contained the present site of Fredericksburg. To encourage settlement, a fifty acre portion of the grant was divided into sixty-four equally sized lots in 1721. The grant also allowed for a church lot and another for a marketplace in the center of town. The plan provided three principle streets parallel to the river and five others perpendicular to the river. These streets remain in Fredericksburg today and over the years have helped shape and define its urban environment.

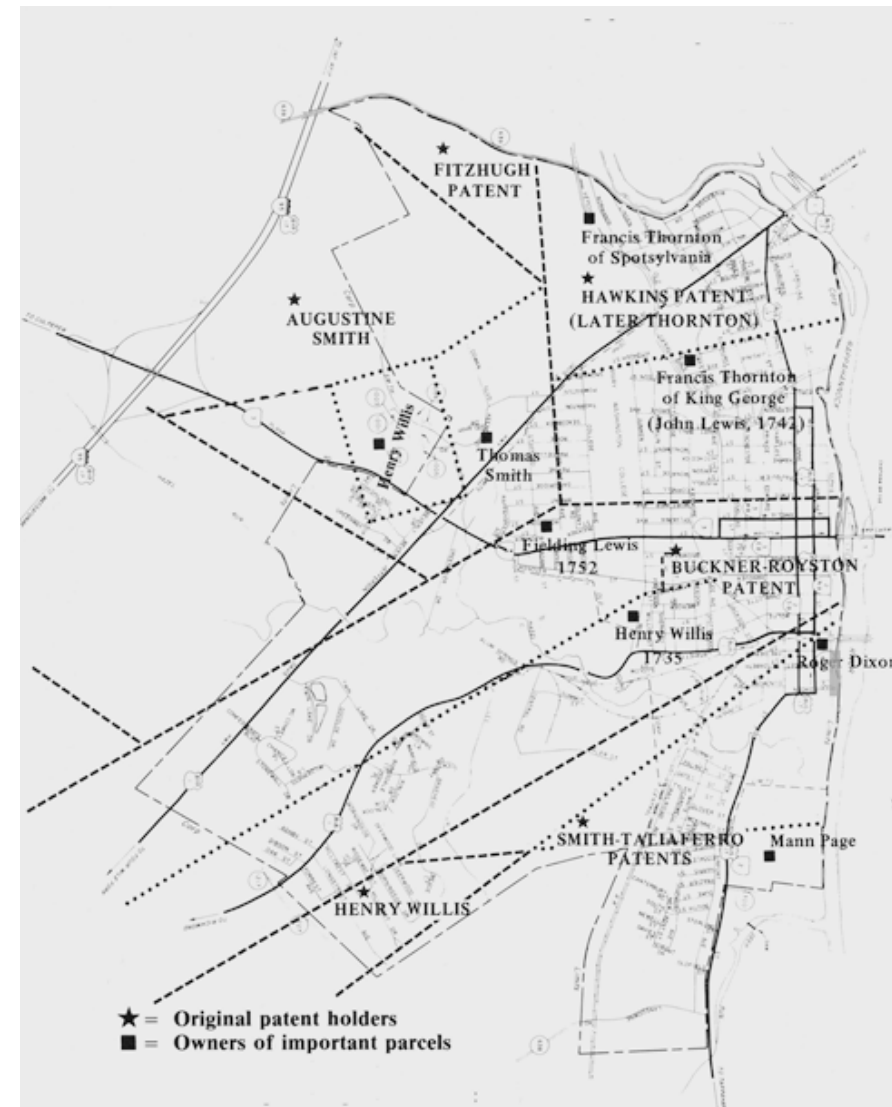
In 1727, a charter was developed to place seaports in Fredericksburg and in the neighboring town of Falmouth. The charter also regulated that houses be built of brick, stone, or wood, and it restricted square footage and roof pitch. By 1732 the town was small but thriving with a dock, warehouses, and a stone quarry. A group of trustees continued to sell lots, and before the Revolutionary War the town size increased fourfold. The increase brought into the town houses which had been built outside of the original sixty-four lots in order to avoid charter regulations.

Fredericksburg was probably named after Frederick, Prince of Wales and son of King George II. The town was home to the families of Fielding Lewis and Augustine Washington, father of George Washington. Ferry Farm, located across the Rappahannock, and several buildings in town belonged to the Washington family.

Until the early years of the nineteenth century, Fredericksburg was a major seaport in the new country. Trade with western Virginia became less significant, but trade to supply the town's inhabitants, numbering 2,500 by 1810, continued to flourish. During this time, several fires destroyed much of the original town architecture. As a result, the town council passed laws requiring that all new structures be made of fireproof brick and slate roofs. These events are evident in the nineteenth century architecture of the downtown area.

Later in the century, Fredericksburg's seaport began to receive competition from the railroads, and by the 1850's sea trade was almost nonexistent. However, Fredericksburg has been the midway point between Richmond and Washington, D.C. During the Civil War it was the site of several major battles and afterwards, it was left to be rebuilt from the ashes of the war. By the twentieth century, new industries were constructed along the Rappahannock, but the town did not regain the importance it had had before the Civil War. In the 1920's the Sylvania Industrial Corporation opened the world's largest cellophane plant just east of town. The water processing plant by the public boat dock was built in the 1940's, and supplied water to the factory until the cellophane plant closed in the 1970's (Shibley 9-21).

The purpose of the Rappahannock has now become primarily recreational, and a flood is the most direct way in which it speaks to the town. This thesis deals with the river's edge and how the dynamic of the river can once again interact with the land and the built environment. The project translates the river into an entity which links the length of the site, transgresses the shoreline, and deliberately demonstrates its changing temperament through the architecture. As part of the thesis, the water processing plant is revived to once again deal with the Rappahannock River, the town, and the idea of water.



Modern Day Fredericksburg

Riverfront Elevation





Site Elements



Water processing plant



Parking lot





Public boat dock



Field