

# 318-320-324 William Street

Fredericksburg, Virginia 22401

The structure that is located at 318, 320, 322, and 324 William Street, with a corner of 913 Charles Street, stands distinctly apart from the other commercial buildings on the street. Many of the restaurants and businesses are historic in character, making the modernist influenced design of the corner structure stand out. Constructed in 1957-1958, several different business now occupy the different store fronts, including a Castiglias Italian Restaurant at 324, a for Rent space in 320, Network Tile, Inc. at 318, and around the corner at 913 Charles Street Monroe Press and Associates, which all utilize the

**Architect:** John J. Ballentine Jr.

**Built:** 1957-1958

**Primary Material:** Brick

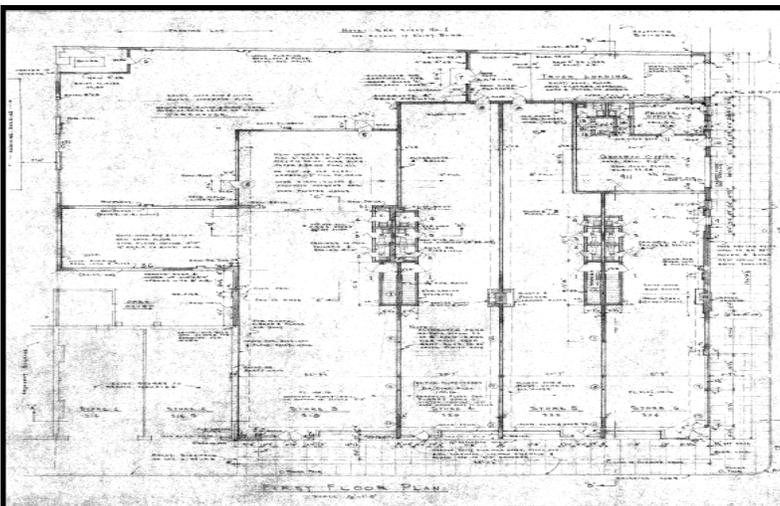
**Square Footage:** 15, 450

**Surveyor:** Dayna Blewis

same building.

The original structure that had stood on this prominent corner of William and Charles Street had been erected around 1796.<sup>1</sup> Owned by Francis M. and George H.S. King, the structure had been referred to as the MS Chancellor building which had operated a longstanding farm machinery business within. Following the issuance of a building permit by the city in 1956,<sup>2</sup> bids were opened for contractors in the “demolition of the William Street frontage and erection of a group of new stores.”<sup>3</sup> The decision to raise the original structure was made after prospective renters had shown little interest in the structure as it stood.<sup>4</sup> Ann King Silver, whose father and brother were the owners of the building, stated that crumbling and deteriorating brick of the structure were also determining factors in the removal of the building.<sup>5</sup> When the structure was torn down in October of 1956, bricks from the dismantled store were put to new use as the interior walls of a local home as well as in the reconstruction of an old tobacco warehouse in Urbana, VA.<sup>6</sup>

Harwell Construction Co. of Orange was awarded the contract to remodel the Chancellor building in 1956.<sup>7</sup> The architect John J. Ballentine Jr. was lo-



To the right: view from William Street showing 318-320-324 William Street

Opposite page top: Corner of William Street and Charles Street

Opposite page bottom: Original First Floor Plan of Structure



cally based, with an office located downtown. Ballentine began designs focusing on an end result that was promoted to be “the closest approach to true Colonial architecture as can be achieved by modern techniques.”<sup>8</sup> He was an initial member of the Board of Historic Zoning,<sup>9</sup> became the Chairman of the Board of Historic Buildings,<sup>10</sup> and was the President of Historic Fredericksburg Inc.<sup>11</sup> This is an interesting fact that he was involved in so many historical aspects of the city, as this specific building that he designed was very modernist influenced. However, it illustrates how he did care about the city’s historical nature, and was representative of how he would be conscious of the visual impacts in new designs. In an unrelated quote to this structure that exemplifies his work philosophy, Ballentine stated that “I have great faith that the city fathers will not only study this design, but the location of the building and do what is proper.”<sup>12</sup> His plan called for four store fronts on the William Street side consisting of “Colonial brick and glass,” and behind the corner establishment on the Charles Street side an office facility of “modified” Colonial styling.<sup>13</sup> The architect stated specifically in 1956 that “we hope to achieve the closest possible approach to the true Colonial spirit in architecture,”<sup>14</sup> going on to say that the “end result will be the closest approach to true Colonial architecture as can be achieved by modern techniques.”<sup>15</sup>

Upon construction, the building was opened in March 14, 1958 as *Flowers By Ross, Inc.*, which was owned by Richard D. Ross.<sup>17</sup> In a debate over the aesthetic changes occurring on William Street, an article in 1973 stated that “the buildings housing Ross’ Flower Shop, the Alice Heflin Executive Fashion Shop, the Top-Value Stamp emporium, the offices of Anderson and Strudwick, etc. as being examples of excellent modern design. They tie in beautifully with the old things surrounding them, both in scale and in use of materials, yet they are unmistakably of the twentieth century.”<sup>18</sup> During the structure’s continual change in use over time, the flower shop was converted into the *China Shoppe*,<sup>19</sup> and later other retailers were also located in the space. In 1998 the building was purchased by Luigi Castiglia, turning the corner location at 324 William Street into *Castiglias Italian Restaurant*,<sup>20</sup> which stands there today.

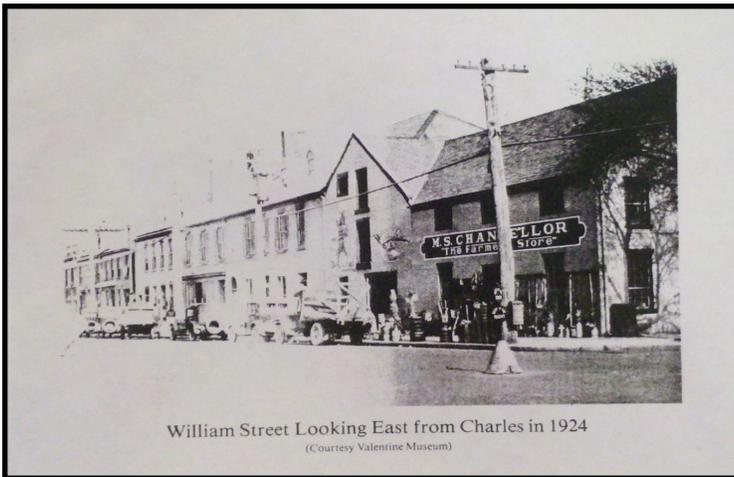
Despite these changes in use and ownership, the exterior of the structure continues to have distinct modernist features. The building that encompasses 318, 320, 322, and 324 William Street as

well as the side which is 913 Charles Street, has a square and rectangular silhouette, and includes a clear rhythm within its features. Five foot regulating lines form within the overhang and subsequent spacing of the rood. The repetitive nature of the roughly three foot spacing of the large windows, are also important in the fluidity of Modernist design.

The structure is not set back from the property line, as it sites right up against the public sidewalk. Each establishment within the building of 318, 320, 322, and 324 has its own entrance, but shares the design of its neighbors. The overhang forms a seamless line across the structure over all of the stores, which also all have the same window designs. The massing of the middle of the structure at 324 William Street is all the same height, but the elevation is raised on the ends over the other addresses. The treatment of the entryway of 324 William Street is another

unique feature, as the structure is precisely on the corner of William Street and Charles Street, creating the main door at a direct angle on the corner.

Consisting of a majority of brick, other materials include large glass panes, a metal overhang, as well as smaller amounts of stone, wood, and cement. Metal was an important aspect in many modernist structures, allowing architects to create designs previously not possible. During the construction of the building, the architect Ballentine was quoted saying that “work will start as soon as delivery of the necessary structural steel is received.”<sup>21</sup> The front of the building is constructed of these steel structural supports, and can thus physically support a second story, while the rear of the building is supported by wood beams and cannot support as much additional weight.<sup>22</sup> The large overhang also creates a dramatic shadow pattern on the ground, as well as on other parts of the building depending on the time of day. The floor plan of the structure consists of a wide front room surrounded by floor to ceiling windows, which is an important Modernist feature of utilizing natural light in designs, and is employed by architects such as Philip Johnson.<sup>23</sup> As the new building was constructed on the footprint of the old MS Chancellor store, the existing basement is located under the structure, which is something not common in Modernist designs. As mentioned previously, as the new structure was originally designed to be four separate units, therefore four separate staircases were constructed down into the basement space, so that each establishment could have individual access.



William Street Looking East from Charles in 1924  
(Courtesy Valentine Museum)



**T**o the right: view from 324 William Street down William Street

**B**ottom left: view of overhang from 318 William Street

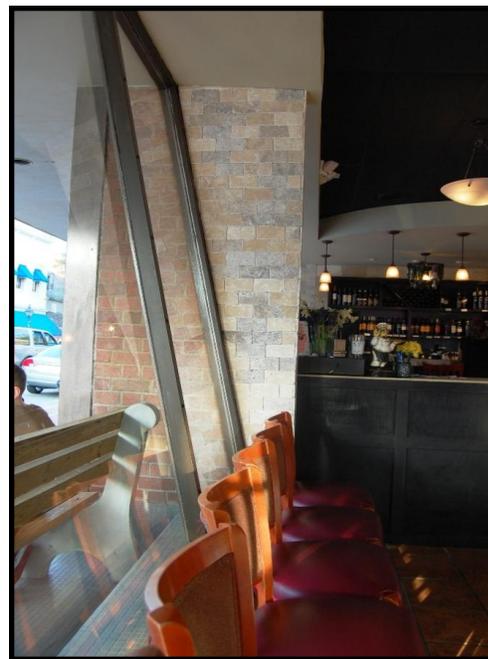
**B**ottom right: Interior Window angles inside 324 William Street

**O**pposite page bottom:  
Original MS Chancellor building

**O**pposite page bottom:  
Castiglias Restaurant at 324 William Street at night



Right within the heart of downtown Fredericksburg, it is very refreshing to see a Modernist structure such as this building. There are similar commercial structures further outside of downtown on Princess Anne Street, and it can be hypothesized that restaurants and other stores found use within the common features of the Modernist style. These characteristics also have similarities to some of the works of the great modernist architects. For instance, Richard Neutra used large window panes with three foot spacing, and Frank Lloyd Wright made great use of large overhangs. While it cannot be connected that there was ever any direct influence of any specific modernist architect, the structure on William Street was definitely influenced by numerous Modernist aspects, and because of its location is a beneficial structure within Fredericksburg.



Endnotes:

- Muse, Paul. "Early American is Keynote: J. Granger Macfarlane Home in Battlefield Park is Adorned with Antique Brick ." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 23 February 1957.
- Photographs of the MS Chancellor Building were found in books within book by Avey Jr., Edward. "The Streets of Fredericksburg." Virginia Room Rappahannock Regional Library.
- Haas, Marilla. Building Permit Cards, Land Records Office, City of Fredericksburg City Hall.
- "Contract Signed for Remodeling of Landmark." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 25 August 1956.
- "Contract Signed for Remodeling of Landmark." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 25 August 1956.
- Craig Schulin of the Free Lance-Star archives led to the finding of this influential article.
- Phone interview with Ann King Silver. 15 April 2011. Ann King Silver is daughter and brother of Francis M. and George H.S. King. She also stated along with the bricks, that another reason for the closing of the MS Chancellor store as a farm equipment establishment was that her father would receive phone calls from farmers at 4:30am asking how to work the new technology of the Milkens.
- Muse, Paul. "Early American is Keynote: J. Granger Macfarlane Home in Battlefield Park is Adorned with Antique Brick ." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 23 February 1957.
- "Bygone Days: From the files of the Free Lance-Star, Week Beginning Aug. 22." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archives. 23 August 1966.
- "Contract Signed for Remodeling of Landmark." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 25 August 1956.
- "Council Hears Plea on On-Way Changes." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 13 December 1967.
- "Notice." The Free Lance-Star. 7 December 1973
- Muse, Paul. "City Manager Polls Fiver Agencies On their Needs for Capital Outlay: On 'Flat' Side." The Free Lance-Star. 9 April 1965.
- Maroney, Sean P. Emails with Sean P. Maroney, the current Executive Director of HFFI, confirms Ballentine was indeed at one point the President. 19 April 2011.
- Muse, Paul. "City Manager Polls Five Agencies On Their Needs for Capital Outlay: On the 'Flat' Side." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archives. 9 April 1965.
- "Contract Signed for Remodeling of Landmark." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 25 August 1956.
- "Contract Signed for Remodeling of Landmark." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 25 August 1956.
- "Contract Signed for Remodeling of Landmark." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 25 August 1956.
- "Best Wishes to Flowers By Ross." The Free Lance-Star. 13 March 1958.
- Central Rappahannock Heritage Center, specifically Barry McGhee, was also helpful in tracing the historic city directories, in order to document the transfer of use from the MS Chancellor agricultural building, into use in the more modern structure to house *Flowers By Ross*.
- Mead, Eileen. "Fondness for flowers blooms into business." The Free Lance-Star. 18 July 1996.
- King, Pauline G. Chairmen Dept. of Art Mary Washington College. "Plan is called 'aesthetic prostitution.'" The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archives. 11 December 1973.
- "Ross Flower, China Shops to make downtown move." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archives. 30 August 1982.
- Castiglia, Luigi. Meetings with Luigi Castiglia at Castiglias Italian Restaurant and Pizzeria, and from information from Ann King Silver whom sold the building to Luigi Castiglia.
- "Contract Signed for Remodeling of Landmark." The Free Lance-Star. Newspaper Archive. 25 August 1956.
- Attic Area viewing of Metal support beams in the front of structure and wooden rear beams, courtesy of Luigi Castiglia. 18 April 2011.
- Historic Preservation 471UU "Modernists Mark" class. Study of Architects including Philip Johnson's glass house, among other Modernists architects whose use of natural light was important.