- A Stage for the Town of Floyd -
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my committee, Jim, Bill, and Ellen, for sharing their knowledge as well as their patience, to my family for their encouragement, and to Jennifer for her unwavering love and support.
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Abstract

Architecture extends into a place through the manifestation of the human spirit and will. It should intensify that place and heighten the awareness of human existence. Upon entering into this higher realm of understanding of the self and place, one begins to find beauty in the created object inhabited. This architecture speaks of a higher intention of man, awakens his emotions, and urges his desires to not merely exist but to engage in the celebration of life.

Architecture at the scale of the Town is a stage upon which the daily lives of the individual and the collective are framed, and the exchange of ideas, services, products and entertainment become the scenes of a play. The Town is an artifact of humanity. Through architecture, the Town should be a place where one can refine the mind, body, and soul - a place of fellowship and gathering. The focus of this thesis is to provide such a place for the Town of Floyd, Virginia.
Abiding among the lofty clouds that follow the Blue Ridge Mountains, Floyd County is a center for Appalachian heritage. The county seat is the Town of Floyd, which grows out from the crossing of two primary routes - state route 8 and state route 221. The Town is about forty miles southwest of Roanoke, Virginia, the nearest large city and about thirty miles southeast of Blacksburg, Virginia. The Blue Ridge Parkway, which meanders its way through the mountains from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to its northernmost point in the Shenandoah National Park, is about five miles outside of Town and works its way through the length of the county. Floyd is also one of the primary destinations along “Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail - The Crooked Road”. Established in 2003, the trail winds its way through southwestern Virginia from Ferrum to the final destination at the Ralph Stanley Museum and Traditional Mountain Music Center in Clintwood.

The area around Floyd County was settled in the 1740’s and the Town was incorporated in 1858, then named Jacksonville for the seventh president of the United States. The name was later changed to Floyd in 1896. One institution in town still holds to that remnant of history. The Jacksonville Center epitomizes the culture and heritage of the Town and the surrounding area. Classes in pottery, blacksmithing, glass working are offered almost continually to the community and beyond, thus ensuring that our Appalachian culture is not lost. The works of art produced are often on exhibit and open to both residents and visitors. The streets of the Town are lined with privately owned shops that sell traditionally crafted tapestries, instruments, pottery, glass work, soaps, and many other items that capture the essence of the Town and its people.
Another institution in town is the Floyd Country Store, which has long played host to one of the most well known scenes for bluegrass music - The Friday Night Jamboree. The structure was built in 1913 and is still a permanent fixture in Town. On any given Friday night the Jamboree draws large crowds of both locals and visitor, especially in the warmer months. As numerous bands and single musicians wait their turn on the intimate stage, they find niches between buildings and begin to play. Crowds spill out into the streets as the “twang” of a banjo echoes off of the aged, brick walls. Soon small groups begin to huddle around and their bodies frame a stage at a whispers distance. Then as the band's number is called, the crowd disperses and joins a new audience.

Without fail, where you find bluegrass music, you will find dancing. As the deep hum of the upright bass keeps time for the band, the feet of the dancers thump against the hardwood floor, creating another layer to the rhythm. The entire structure seems to come to life as an instrument played with the feet. At this small but immensely important venue, the Appalachian traditional dances like the flat-foot and the square dance are being passed on from one generation to the next.

Travelers from all over the world flock to this bluegrass mecca to hear some of the finest traditional bluegrass around. The Jamboree has gained recognition from magazines like Country Living, American Profile Magazine, and even the Washington Post. Beyond the notoriety that the Floyd Country Store has received is something much more essential to the life of the residents and to civilization in general. The gathering of people together for a like cause has shaped our idea of society. What began as just a few guys sitting around and picking out some tunes together has become a weekly gathering of people from all over the area. The assembling of friends week after week promotes the friendly spirit for which Floyd has become known.
The chosen site is located just east of the primary intersection in town. It is a vacant lot that is now being used for parking. There is a structure on the site that was once a grocery store, but it is vacant as well. This property is at a vital location in the fabric of the town. The physical limits of the site are bound by the more public buildings at its western edge, a private residence at its eastern edge, a cemetery at its southern edge, and the northern edge is made by the main street (Route 221). After investigation and urging from my committee, I found that the phenomenal limits of the site extend much further into the town fabric.
Beginnings

My initial model studies were premature attempts to approach the design from an isolated position where the structure was free from the existing context. My first reaction was to present the structure to the main street, route 221, (see photos 9-A and 9-B) but there exists an axis with route 8 that cannot be ignored. (See Photo 3, page 08) The subsequent attempt focused primarily on this axis, but it lacked the respectful address of the main street. (See Photo 9-C and 9-D) A direct visual axis with both primary routes through town became a spring-point for the generation of idea, form, and program.

“The beginning is the most important part of the work.” – Plato, The Republic
The significance of the building extending down these axes had to begin at the floor. My committee urged me to remove myself from the stipulations of program and design just the floor, and to think about how the floor can create places for events to happen. A place for a farmer’s market, a place from someone to sit and eat lunch, or perhaps even a place for the musician to play as he waits his turn on stage.

My first attempts at creating this floor were an examination of how the axes intersected. At their crossing, I placed an intense change in elevation enclosed by a level floor area. I saw this as possibly being the main auditorium surrounded by an area from which a spectator could look down onto the stage. This early concept became a primary form giver that evolved over the duration of the design process. The change in topography of this floor became a base for the rest of the structure – a plinth from which the remaining space grew. The creation of the plinth set a datum that became the primary generator of the building section.