

The „Grube“

At this location, from the 13th century until the late 19th century, the city wall of Rostock once stood. Two towers guarded the area. In the 13th century, an artificial watercourse was created, linking the Upper Warnow with the Lower Warnow at the Grube Gate (Image 3).

The waterway, known as the “Grube,” served both as a drain for surface and wastewater as well as a basis for the establishment of various trades. Watermills could be operated along the Grube, and the tanners used the water to rinse animal hides. In 1618/19, a windmill and pumping works were added to the tall tower above the watercourse in order to temporarily supply a fountain on the New Market. In 1662, the university acquired the structure for use as an observatory (*Specula*), which it operated until the 18th century. In 1805, a hospital was set up at the city wall to address the inadequate medical care in the city. The Specula Tower was then used as an autopsy room and to house patients with infectious diseases. The hospital was demolished in 1846.

Goods transport along Grubenstraße

With the construction of the Bad Kleinen–Rostock railway line, a central terminus was built south of the city fortifications in 1850. In 1853 it received its distinctive main building and was named “Friedrich-Franz-Station” in honor of the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg. From the very beginning, there were plans to connect the Friedrich-Franz-Station with the city harbor by a freight line. Therefore a passageway was built into the city fortifications, designed to be closed off by a gate. For the relocation of the railway line, the Grube was vaulted over and converted into an underground canal. Since the track lay below the level of the surrounding terrain, the embankment still had to be crossed by means of a drawbridge (Image 1).

The railway connection between Friedrich-Franz-Station and the city harbor went into operation in 1855. Until the construction of Rostock’s main station in the late 19th century, Friedrich-Franz-Station was the city’s central station. Both the station and the freight line along Grubenstraße remained in use until 1996 (Image 2).

The new Grubenstraße

In the mid-1990s, Grubenstraße was reconstructed. The level of the railway embankment was raised. A new artificial watercourse was created to recall the former above-ground Grube. The actual Grube runs underground. In 2003, Thomas Leu created the artwork *Raumklammer* (“Spatial Clamp”), intended to emphasize the spatial importance of the bridge situation.

Image 1 Due to the difference in elevation, the railway line at the site of the historic Viergelinden Bridge had to be crossed by a drawbridge from 1853 onward. The photograph was taken around 1930. Photographer: Karl Eschenburg. Source: Collection Thomas Werner

Image 2 Grubenstraße was used for freight transport until 1996. Shown here in a photograph from 1979. Photographer: Gustav Heisenberg. © Stadtarchiv Rostock

Image 3 Numerous connecting bridges were built across the Grube. In the picture you’ll see the Viergelinden Bridge, its name referring to the operation of watermills—“Grinden” is an old word for mill runs. At the right edge of the image stands the Specula Tower and, beside it, the somewhat smaller “Swineherd’s Tower.” *Tableau of Rostock and its Surroundings* (detail) (1839) by A. Deinert, colored lithograph. © Kulturhistorisches Museum Rostock

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