

# Renovation work resumes on Lord-Higel House in Venice

Earle Kimmel

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VENICE – Workers from Ball Construction recently started work on the exterior of the Lord-Higel House, the second-oldest home in Sarasota County.

Restoration efforts on the house – built in 1896 and moved from the south shore of Roberts Bay to its current location at 409 Granada Ave. in 2005 – have been ongoing for several years.

Although the city owns the house, Venice Heritage Inc. has been raising money for and managing the restoration effort.

Ronnie Fernandez, chairman of Venice Heritage Inc., told the Venice City Council in January 2020 that it had all the funding in hand to restore the historic structure.

But a combination of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown and the unforeseen need to restore the second floor's exterior – in part to remedy a water

intrusion problem – means that the nonprofit will have to resume fundraising to finish the job.



The work that Ball Construction started the week of Feb. 8 involved replacing the siding on the second floor, to stop leaks.

“That had to take priority over the original project,” noted Venice Historical Resources manager Harry Klinkhamer.

“It was quite damaged because of the way it was installed,” Venice Heritage treasurer Dorothy Korwek said of the work. “All the nails had rusted; when metal rusts, it expands and cracks all the lumber.”

That siding, Korwek said, is believed to be part of the original structure.

Since then, construction techniques have changed to better shield the nails.

“It worked for 90 years; it doesn’t work that way anymore,” she added.

Also, as part of the process, the workers will install plywood and some weather sealing.

Because of COVID-19-prompted delays, however, the material needed for the new siding has not arrived at the vendor for milling, Korwek said.

“One would have never thought we’d have trouble getting wood for the siding milled to the appropriate profile,” she added.

The siding on the first floor already has been replaced.



When renovation costs originally were pegged at roughly \$400,000, most of the work was going to go into the first floor.

But as work progressed, it became clear that water intrusion would plague the interior of the house unless the second floor siding was replaced, too.

While Venice Heritage has all the architectural diagrams ready for the work to be done, the pandemic also has resulted in a cost increase both for labor and materials, so the nonprofit is still waiting for exact figures to determine how much more money must be raised, though they’re anticipating it may be as much as another \$250,000.

Materials have tripled in cost.

“Due to COVID, it’s hard to get any fundraising events going on around Venice,” Fernandez said. “We do talk about it and try to figure out – when the time comes – what we can do to raise a little bit more money.”

Until then, donations can be made online at [veniceheritage.org](http://veniceheritage.org) and proceeds from the sale of some items at the online gift shop, such as the “Lost Buildings of Venice” tropical shirt, go to the Lord-Higel House.

Once the exterior is finished, workers will begin in earnest on restoring the inside.

Because of ADA accessibility requirements, the second floor will be used for storage, while the first floor will be transformed into a museum area with the exhibits designed by Venice Historical Resources to reflect how the area’s original pioneers lived.

The hope is to have the house renovated by the end of the year.

The house was built by prominent Sarasota landowner and real estate promoter J.H. Lord in 1896 and was once surrounded by acres of orange groves.

Work on key external facilities, including a utility building and external restroom, ADA access ramp for the house and a drainage retention pond, are on hold until after the city finishes the expansion of Venice City Hall, which includes construction of a new Fire Station 51 on the city hall campus.

Until that is finished, the city needs to make use of the parking space on the Lord-Higel property.

Korwek noted that there will be no indoor plumbing at Lord-Higel House, which is period accurate.

“In 1896,” she said, “you had an outhouse and you had a pump [and] well outside.”