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At long last, restoration of Moraga Adobe begins

By Sora O'Doherty



A project long in the works has broken ground, so to speak. J&J Ranch, the developers of a new housing development in Orinda, have begun the restoration of the Moraga Adobe. The historic building is the oldest extant building in Contra Costa County. The building is subject to a memorandum of understanding under which the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe can purchase the building to preserve it and make it accessible to the public and a history and learning center. The developer will turn the restored building over to the Friends if they succeed in raising the purchase price. If not, the building would be made a part of the housing development. However, the Friends have no doubt that they will succeed. The purchase includes the building and its surrounding 2.3 acres of land.

20th Century additions to the rear of the Moraga Adobe are being removed and discarded as J&J Ranch begins the promised restoration of the historic site. Photo Sora O'Doherty

According to the MOU, the Friends needed to meet certain purchase goals, and each goal has been met on time. Thus far, \$135,000 of the total purchase price of \$500,000 has been paid. The final payment of \$365,000 is due next September. For a number of years, the

Friends have had a major annual fundraiser, the Fandango, but the event had to be canceled this year owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, fundraising continues, including a paver purchase program available on the Friends website. The Friends are also committed to raising an additional half-million dollars as an endowment to provide for ongoing costs of maintaining the Adobe.

Jeff Boero, FJMA Secretary, recently toured the works with architect and FJMA member James Wright. J&J Ranch is grading around the lot, removing some of the brush, and has also begun the deconstruction of the 1941 addition to the home, removing the wood frame additions put up by the Irvine family. According to Boero, the developers have been enormously cooperative in the effort to restore the Adobe and make it available for public access. J&J is working with preservation architect, Michael Garavaglia.

Boero is excited about artifact retrieval from the site, although the builder is now grading with heavy equipment. Boero says that in 2009 developers commissioned a report they were asked to do as part of the planning approval process identify items of historical significance and interest.

According to Boero, the report concluded that there were more than likely additional items of interest to be found on the property. He has contacted Saint Mary's College's school of archaeology, and would love to get them involved to do further research in the correct fashion. Boero hopes that all finds will be curated and ultimately displayed at the adobe.

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