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## Lakeview's careful restoration proceeds

Basement required concrete slab to prevent walls from caving in  
**BY DAN HOWLEY**  
**Staff Writer**

The first phase of a multiyear restoration project aimed at returning the Lakeview mansion in Jamesburg to its former splendor is wrapping up.



Shuttered for nearly two years due to a number of structural deficiencies that caused portions of the building to sag, Lakeview, also known as the Buckelew mansion, was in desperate need of a thorough restoration. And while phase one of its long-planned improvements may be nearing completion, the project has faced a number of difficulties, Jamesburg Historical Association member Elliot Stroul explained.

"There is a lot of repair work going on. There are some areas that cosmetically are damaged, and they are shoring some of that stuff and continuing repairs," Stroul said.

"When you get into a project like this, you know you are going to find more and more stuff," he added.

One unforeseen problem encountered by the restoration team, which is being led by the Cherry Hill-based contracting firm of Wu & Associates, was asbestos in the building's west side.

"They are removing asbestos underneath the west part of the building, which is the meeting room, and they had to shore up the structure to do that," Stroul said.

The project was also somewhat hampered by the discovery of a high water table in the mansion's basement, said Katherine Ng, director of business development with Wu & Associates.

"This required a redesign and the installation of additional stone and geofabric to secure the foundations," Ng said.

The mansion's basement also required the installation of a concrete slab to stabilize the walls in order to prevent them from caving in, Stroul said.



Top: Denny Caruso looks over the work being done in Lakeview's basement, where workers had to stabilize the walls to prevent them from caving in.

PHOTOS BY JEFF GRANIT staff

"These are all old bricks. [They] are all a couple of hundred years old, and they needed to be reinforced," he explained.



Above: Denny Caruso points out the steel structural supports installed in the basement. Below: Shutters are tagged to show where each was located on the outside of the mansion. Aesthetic improvements will take place once the building is made

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structurally sound.  
 PHOTOS BY JEFF GRANIT staff

With the slab in place, Stroul said, the team was expected to install a new structural beam in the basement. Workers could then move on to installing a new furnace and boiler, Stroul added.

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Although the mansion's basement has required a good deal of work, Stroul said it should not be lost on people that the oldest part of the structure, which was built in 1685, is over 300 years old.

"When you are dealing with a house that is this old, you have to make sure that there is some structural integrity. We had to get the basement dug out, and there were a lot of water problems down there because it wasn't being drained properly. I mean, you have to remember that the drainage issues go back to the 1830s, 1840s. So, we had to redo that," Stroul said.

"What's amazing is that for the most part, the building from 1685 — the original two rooms in the back — are in pretty good shape," he added.

In addition to the restoration of its basement, Lakeview has required work on its upper floors as well.

A tour of the mansion as it stands now would reveal a building filled with a maze of structural supports in nearly every room and hallway to prevent a cave-in, Stroul said.

"The internal bricks that they used for interior walls were not fired the same way they are fired for exterior [walls]. They are only designed to last 50 years," he said, adding that the portions of the house that used those bricks are between 160 and 170 years old.



to local teachers. The Paxton era came to an end in the 1970s, when the heirs had all died off.

"You can put your fingers through some of the bricks where they are close to the wall where there has been damage," Stroul added.

In addition to improving the structural integrity of the mansion, Stroul said the restoration team has performed work on the property's water drainage system.

"They took apart the front porch and put in a new French drain system," he said. "There is a whole new drainage system, a sump pump — the whole nine yards."

Once phase one of the project is completed, the focus will shift to improving the aesthetics of the mansion.

"There is a lot of cosmetic work that needs to be done both inside and outside, including painting the exterior in the spring. It has to be completely scraped," he said.

The mansion's original shutters, which were taken down before work began in order to prevent them from being damaged, will also be restored and reinstalled in their original positions.

"All of the shutters have been photographed and catalogued as to where they go on the windows, so when they are put back, they will be put back on the proper windows," Stroul said.

The final cost of phase one of the project is expected to run somewhere in the neighborhood of \$450,000, Stroul said, adding that all of the funding has come exclusively from grants provided by Middlesex County.

"This is something that has needed to be done for some time, but the historical association didn't have the funds," he said.

While discussing the restoration project, Stroul went to great lengths to praise Wu & Associates and project manager Robert O'Reilly.

"When you put out bids for this type of work, you are putting out bids to companies that have experience. It's not just about the cost of the bid; they have to have the right certifications to do this type of work," Stroul said. "If they don't have historical, accurate certification, they don't get the job. We are not going to work with somebody who doesn't know.

"And I will tell you that I have seen evidence from the people that are working on this project that they care about history and they care about what they are doing," he added.

Stroul said it remains unclear when the mansion will reopen.

Lakeview was closed in 2008 after an inspection deemed the building to be structurally unstable.

The oldest part of the house dates back to 1685, when it was built by Scottish settler William Davison. Additions were built in 1790, 1832 and 1870, bringing the total number of rooms to 23. One famous resident, James Buckelew, the borough's namesake, was responsible for the majority of the additions, because he and his wife, Margaret, had to make room for their six children.

The large, two-story section of the house was added in the 1830s.

The Buckelew heirs sold the house in the early 1900s to Albert and Emma Paxton, who ran a boarding house, often renting out rooms

Robert Mendoker, founder of the historical association, spearheaded the effort to acquire the house back in the 1970s. He and others were able to procure state and local funding to buy the mansion, which was deeded to the borough. Since then, Lakeview Mansion has served as a multipurpose museum.