



California School for the Deaf.

Mistake Behind Move of Deaf and Blind Schools

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STAFF WRITER

The primary reason for moving the Schools for the Deaf and Blind — an active earthquake fault underneath school buildings — apparently does not exist.

The Daily Californian has learned after a month-long investigation that state officials had no proof of such an active fault trace when they made their decision to move the schools in 1973. Ten months remain until the two state schools are due to be moved to Fremont from their 112-year-old home in Berkeley.

No geologic investigation of the Berkeley site was performed until last year when the university, in compiling an environmental impact report for its plan to acquire the valuable 50-acre parcel, commissioned a fault hazard study of the property.

That study found that the alleged fault line under the buildings was not an active trace. Another trace is active but is on the edge of campus, away from the buildings and poses no hazard to the bulk of the campus as defined by state

earthquake safety law.

State officials based their claim of an active trace running through the buildings on U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) maps. The maps show two possible traces passing through school property, one beneath several buildings.

The only evidence that the trace shown beneath the buildings might have been active, however, was a second-hand verbal account given to the USGS mapmaker. That account came from a man who recalled a conversation he had thirty years earlier with another man who remembered seeing evidence of surface rupture somewhere on the western side of the site when he was a small boy.

In 1972, state officials debated whether to rehabilitate or relocate the schools following reports by the state fire marshal and state architect that the school buildings did not meet fire, safety and seismic codes. A feasibility study by the state Office of Architecture and Construction stated that the facilities could be rehabilitated, upgraded to pertinent codes, and modernized for less money

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than it would cost to relocate.

But state officials killed the possibility of rehabilitation after a state law was passed the same year (SB 689) stating, "No school building shall be constructed or situated on the trace of an active geological fault." This law, in view of the geologic maps showing a fault trace under school buildings, "mandated the relocation," according to a report written at the time by Hugh Schunhoff, then Superintendent of the School for the Deaf.

Opponents of the decision to move the schools — fearful that deaf and blind pupils, in moving from Berkeley to Fremont, would be immeasurably harmed by the loss of special educational, cultural, vocational and medical facilities — argued that the state should have done geologic studies before ordering the move.

But Wilson Riles, state Superintendent of Education, and Barry Griffing, then Assistant Superintendent for Special Education — the two top state officials in charge of the schools — said that existing evidence was conclusive in showing that the school buildings were astride an active trace of the Hayward fault.

During the heated debate at the time, Riles and Griffing repeatedly cited the maps of the USGS, as well as those of the California Division of Mines and Geology and the Department of Geology and Geophysics at the University of California. They also referred to one person they called "the world's foremost authority on the Hayward fault."

Reached for comment last week in Sacramento, Griffing said, "You should talk to Dorothy Radbruch-Hall. She's the world's foremost authority on that fault."

Radbruch-Hall works for the U.S. Geological Survey. Interviews last week with representatives

of the California Division of Mines and Geology and UC Berkeley's Department of Geology and Geophysics indicated that their own maps are principally based on her USGS maps of the Hayward Fault.

Radbruch-Hall, interviewed by telephone Friday, emphasized that the two traces she drew through the schools-site were inferred traces indicated by dotted lines, and not confirmed traces, which would have been shown by solid lines.

She said the westerly trace she drew under the school buildings was based on "very indirect" information told her by now-deceased architect Walter Steilberg in 1965. As noted in the text accompanying the maps (USGS Maps I-813 and I-522), she said, Steilberg reported that in 1925 or 1930 UC engineering professor Joseph LeConte told him that LeConte's father had taken him to the Deaf and Blind site to see the fault trace of the 1868 Hayward quake. Radbruch-Hall said that Steilberg remembered LeConte saying that he was a small boy at the time and that the furrow of the trace was either on what is now Warring St. or between Warring and Prospect.

"If anybody had asked my opinion before deciding to move (the Deaf and Blind Schools)," she said, she would have told them that a site study would have been "the proper thing to do."

"The university (in the 1978 study) has done precisely what they should have done," she said. "The work they've done is much more meticulous than anything I did."

The study, conducted by soils engineer Ben Lennert and UC geology professor Garniss Curtis, concluded that the trace drawn by Radbruch-Hall underneath the school buildings, while possibly the location of an active fault in the remote past, "has not moved in Holocene time (i.e., the past 10,000 to 12,000 years)" and therefore is considered inactive under the state law regarding earthquake hazards.