

# Shrouded UC Role in Deaf-Blind Removal

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(Second of a two-part series: *The California Schools for the Deaf and Blind arrived in Berkeley in 1867 - not 1897 as misprinted yesterday.*)

Robert Gordon Sproul, perhaps more than any other individual, shaped the character of the University of California as it exists today. Chosen as UC Vice President and Comptroller at age 34, he later served as President for 28 years until 1958.

Both at the beginning and end of his distinguished career, Sproul tried to acquire the land occupied by the state Deaf and Blind Schools for the UC Berkeley campus.

Sproul's successor, Clark Kerr, inherited the university's desire for the property and pursued it even more vigorously.

## The Kerr Decade

Kerr and Berkeley Chancellor Glenn Seaborg agreed in June 1959 that acquisition of the Deaf and Blind Schools site was a

"number one priority for the Berkeley campus," according to file records of the Buildings and Campus Development Committee (Berkeley).

"The school and land would be the greatest asset to the Berkeley campus and the university, and we know of nothing with comparable possibilities," Seaborg wrote to Kerr in August.

A list of 13 possible uses for the site included residence hall space, various institutes, research labs, sports and recreation facilities, a computer center and the University Extension.

Prior to these discussions, according to Campus Planning Committee records, "President Kerr (had) been discussing with State Superintendent of Instruction Roy Simpson the possibility of university acquisition of the property of the State Schools for the Deaf and Blind." Simpson, the state official in charge of the schools, was the person whom Sproul also had contacted.

Simpson was replaced as state superintendent in 1963 by Max Rafferty. In 1964, Kerr wrote to Rafferty:

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Former UC President  
Clark Kerr

# THE DAILY CALIFORNIAN

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1979

VOLUME X, NO. 214

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

# Deaf-Blind

from front page

"As we have discussed orally, the University of California wishes to ask for your views about a possible relocation of the School for the Blind (later correspondence indicates Kerr meant to include the Deaf School as well) in Berkeley so that the university campus might be expanded."

Kerr wrote that the "University has two great future needs at Berkeley." The first was "research centers and institutes" for the expanding graduate student population. The second was a medical school:

"The university's long range plan includes the establishment of a medical school attached to the Berkeley campus . . . A survey of sites leads us to the conclusion that a suitable location for the medical school is the site now occupied by the School for the Blind (and Deaf) in Berkeley."

Rafferty replied that "deaf and blind residents of the state are extremely proud of their respective schools" and that they had worked very hard to build up their present facilities. He also said that the state government was going to do a major study of deaf education in California and asked if Kerr would like to have the university's proposal made "an integral part" of the study.

**"From everything we've been able to gather over the years the university has been trying to push the schools off and grab that land."**

— Deaf School parent

Kerr replied: "I would appreciate it if you would explore the possibilities for including the university's proposal with (the) study."

Kerr left in 1967. In 1970 the state Assembly Ways and Means Committee conducted hearings on both the need for more UC medical schools and the question of whether the School for the Deaf should be relocated to accommodate multi-handicapped students. State Department of Education officials also said a relocation would rescue the students from drugs in Berkeley.

After correspondence between Ways and Means Committee staff and the UC lobbyist, Berkeley campus officials discussed what use the university could make of the Deaf School property should

the state decide to move the school. A committee drew up a list which included research and sports facilities, housing and a medical school.

"The property could be utilized to provide an alternate site for some of the activities now conducted on or near the campus which, if moved, would provide a

**"I don't think it's quite proper to characterize our efforts as urging the schools to be moved."**

— Jay Michael, former UC chief lobbyist

more satisfactory site for a portion of the medical school land requirements," Vice Chancellor Robert Connick wrote at the time, adding that it and other possibilities, however, "were not pressing needs . . . for the near future."

The state legislature at the time did not decide to move the Deaf School.

Permission for the Deaf and Blind Schools to remain in Berkeley, however, was by no means assured. The state fire marshal and state architect found in early 1972 that the buildings did not meet fire, safety and earthquake standards.

A feasibility study by the state architect's office said that the campus could be brought up to code, expanded and modernized for less money than it would cost to relocate. But in late 1972 a state law passed stating that no school

ing the move. Department of Education officials say the evidence of the fault seemed conclusive at the time and that a study would have been too expensive.

Barry Griffing, assistant superintendent for Special Education at the time, was quoted in 1973 news reports as saying the study would have cost \$70,000.

Griffing told the New York Times two weeks ago the study would have cost \$250,000. The man who performed the actual study on the site for the university — soils engineer Ben Lennert — told the Daily Californian that his study cost \$15,000.

Recent interviews with several of the key figures from the university, the Department of Education and the Schools for the Deaf and Blind involved in the discussions to relocate the schools in the early '70s give conflicting accounts of the reasons behind moving the schools.

Many staff members and parents from the schools say Department of Education officials used whatever excuse was convenient at the time — drug problem, multi-handicapped expansion, fire code, earthquake fault — to try to move the schools. They also say the university was behind the scenes helping to orchestrate the effort so it could get the property. University representatives say this is nonsense and the university only responded to indications that the schools might be moving.

Some state and school officials say it was "empire builders" in the Department of Education, if not the university, or both.

"Everybody wants to be the captain of an empire," Frank Lanterman, former head of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, said Wednesday. Lanterman, now retired after 28 years in the legislature, said the discussions before his committee in 1970 over relocating the Deaf and Blind schools and the university's need for medical facilities was an issue of "priority of need for the land . . . the most concentrated use of the site."

Lanterman said it is hard to get direct answers on the university's efforts to acquire the property because it is such "an emotional issue."

building could be located on the active trace of an earthquake fault.

Because geologic maps showed an inferred trace under several of the buildings, state officials decided to move the schools. No geologic study to confirm the existence of a trace was done at the time. A site was selected in Fremont, where new \$50 million dollar facilities are due to be completed this summer.

In 1977 the university began planning to develop the site and in 1978 commissioned a geologic study. That study, released this year, found that the fault line alleged to be under buildings was not an active trace.

Critics of the relocation say the state should have conducted its own geologic study before order-