

# School for the Deaf holds its last Berkeley graduation

By ROBIN UPDIKE

BERKELEY — The rustling of the bay breeze through the tall trees that surround the California School for the Deaf was clearly audible as the nearly 600 relatives and friends of the graduating class of 1980 waited in the campus courtyard for commencement to begin.

The crowd itself made surprisingly little noise. Most of those who attended the Saturday afternoon graduation held animated, but silent, conversations in sign language — the language through which students at the school have communicated with each other and the hearing world since the school was founded 115 years ago.

From now on few such conversations will be held within the confines of the graceful, Spanish style buildings. Beginning this fall, the California School for the deaf, and its neighbor, the California School for the Blind, will be housed in new buildings in Fremont.

The relocations follow months of

controversy over the safety and suitability of the Berkeley buildings. Some safety experts have argued that the Berkeley buildings, which were constructed in 1932 after fires destroyed the original buildings, would not withstand strong earthquakes. Some administrators at the schools, particularly at the school for the deaf, have said that the schools need to expand to larger, more modern buildings.

During the often bitter dispute, most students, parents and administrators associated with the school for the deaf were in favor of the move. Most people connected with the school for the blind opposed it.

As a worn recording of "Pomp and Circumstance" played over the loudspeaker system Saturday, the 43 graduating seniors marched past the aisles of proud, picture-snapping parents to their seats at the front of the courtyard. The girls wore red caps and gowns and the boys wore black. Many of the graduates had red and white carnations,

their class flowers, pinned to their robes.

At the south end of the courtyard, Dr. Henry Klopping, principal of the school for the deaf, sat with a half dozen school administrators and guest speakers. On a large plaque at the back of the stage was the class motto, "Labor Omnia Vincit," "Hard work conquers all things."

In many ways, the 2½-hour ceremony was much like high school graduations everywhere. Representatives of such organizations as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Military Order of World Wars, the Delta Zeta and Phi Kappa Zeta sororities, and the parent teacher association, presented certain members of the graduating class with scholarships and awards. Thomas Saavedra, the class valedictorian, received half a dozen awards, including a \$1,000 scholarship to Gallaudet College, the college for the deaf in Washington, D.C.

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—G photo by Mike Musielski

**Lenore Hellberg signs her salutatory speech**

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But in other ways the ceremony was unique.

Principal Klopping read aloud, and simultaneously in sign language a letter of congratulations from Governor Brown, who urged the graduates to continue their efforts to "mainstream the deaf."

Graduate Jeff Jones, a young man with the neat and formal bearing of a military cadet, led the audience in a signed, and silent, rendition of the pledge of allegiance.

However, what seemed to distinguish most Saturday's ceremony at the school for the deaf was the common theme of many of the speakers, that despite a long and successful history in Berkeley the school will be better off in Fremont. A representative from the California Association of the Deaf said that lobbyists for the deaf in Sacramento have made sure that "your new

school will not be moved back to Berkeley."

In his valedictory speech Saavedra commended those students and parents who "worked hard" to overcome the opposition to the move to Fremont.

And Hugo Schunhoff, a former superintendent of the school, told the graduates that although the school will be at a new site next fall, "it is still your school."

"Next fall you will all have the opportunity to watch football games there," he said, "attend events in that beautiful new theater, and visit the new student center and library."

And then, referring to the eagle that is part of the emblem of the school for the deaf, Schunhoff said: "It is with tears in our eyes, but joy in our hearts, that we will follow that eagle to Fremont."