

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

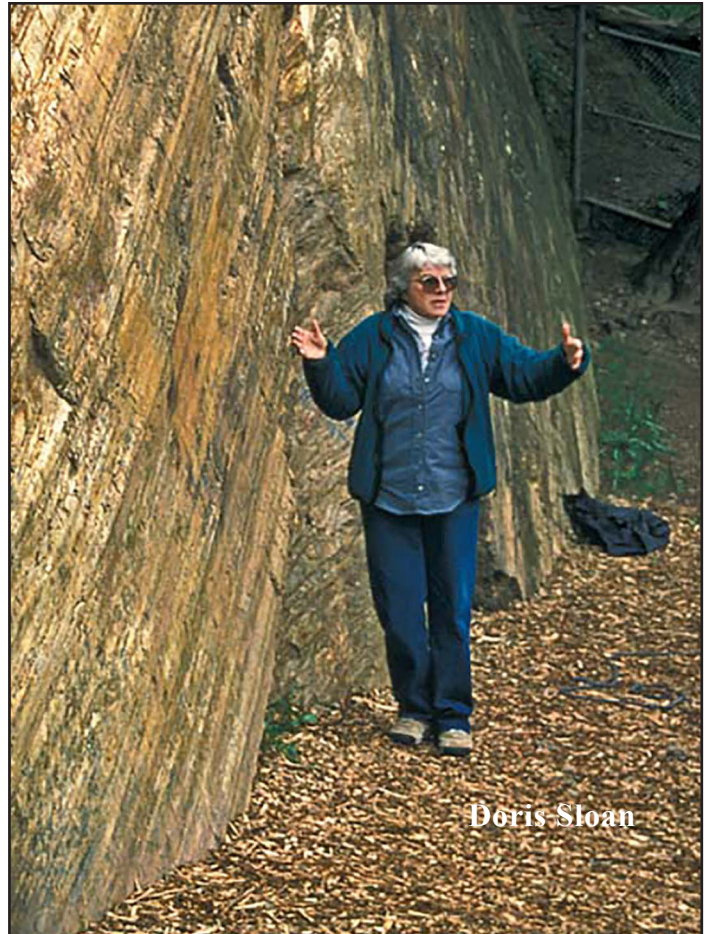
Dr. Doris Sloan

by Robin Rudderow - 2015

A living legend was among us when Dr. Doris Sloan, UC Berkeley professor emeritus, spoke at Campbell Cove about her involvement in the protest of PG&E's nuclear power plant 50 years ago. Back in the early 1960's, Dr. Sloan was then a young Sebastopol mother. She, like others, knew little about nuclear power, pro or con. The greatest concern for many was the aesthetics of Bodega Bay being ruined by the 50 foot tall reactor and the 300 foot tall emissions stack on Bodega Head, and the tall steel towers that would march across Doran Beach with their sagging cables to carry electricity away from the plant.

Knowledge of earthquakes and fault zones was minimal then. The shifting of tectonic plates was not fully understood until the mid to late 1960's. Further, it was not a time of citizen involvement in government and civic affairs, and even though the Brown Act required open meetings, small town officials routinely ignored the law. Sonoma County Supervisors saw big tax dollars in the shape of the plant, and they were ready to make it happen for PG&E. Supervisor Everett D. Lampson said that "a million [tax] dollars ought to affect anybody's thinking". Supervisor E.J. "Nin" Guidotti, whose district included Bodega Bay, told his constituents that he knew what was better for them than they did. PG&E KNEW that the plant would be close to the San Andrea Fault. To accommodate that fact, the PG&E engineers "over-designed" the plant, to make sure that it would withstand an earthquake.

An energetic and articulate young man named David Pesonen, fresh out of college and an employee of the Sierra Club, lead the effort against the power plant. To get more people involved, he conducted an informational public meeting in 1962, which Doris Sloan attended. The meeting was droning on until Alexander Grendon, Coordinator of the Office of Atomic Energy Development and Radiation Protection in the Office of the Governor, spoke up and told the people that they didn't know anything about nuclear power and needed to rely on the experts. Instead of calming fears, pandemonium erupted as the citizens of Sonoma County realized that the threat of nuclear fall-out was at their door step. The meeting was recorded by KPFA, and broadcast as a show called "The People vs. The Experts." KPFA's sister station, KPFA in Los Angeles rebroadcast the show, and it was heard by Navy scientist Dr. Pierre Saint-Amand in Southern California. Dr. Saint-Amand had been present for the Chilean earthquake in 1962, the largest known earthquake (9.5 on Richter scale). He immediately recognized the grave danger of placing a nuclear power plant by an earthquake fault, and contacted David Pesonen to say he would help.



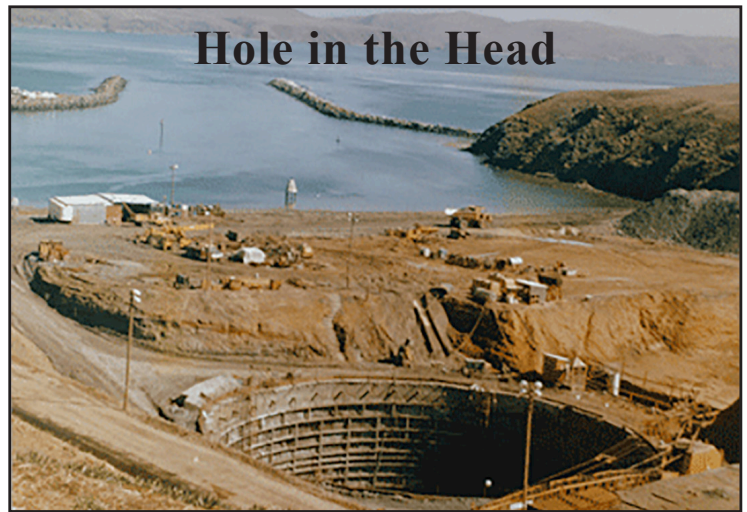
Doris Sloan

DORIS SLOAN, PhD

Dr. Sloan was asked to escort Dr. Saint-Amand to the power plant site at Campbell Cove to conduct an inspection. They approached the plant site with some trepidation, not sure how they would get past the guard. But it was a dreary Bodega Bay day and there was no construction activity and no guard in the guard house either! A inspection by Dr. Saint-Amand of a side of the hill cut away by PG&E, so they could dig the Hole In the Head, revealed a wide zone of “fault gouge”, which is crushed and ground-up rock produced by friction between the two sides when a fault moves. Dr. Saint-Amand wrote a report about his findings.

To coalesce the opposition to the plant, a group of Bay Area people formed the Northern California Association to Preserve Bodega Head and Harbor. One of the founders was San Francisco Chronicle writer Harold Gilliam, who had taken a temporary job in Washington D.C. to help Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall write a book. Harold was thus in a prime position to pass Dr. Saint-Amand’s report on to Secretary Udall, who expressed “grave concern” for the safety of the Bodega plant in a letter to the Atomic Energy Commission. The AEC called for an inspection by the US Geological Survey. The USGS report was “devastating”, and PG&E quickly announced in October 1964 that the plans for a nuclear power plant on the Bodega Head were scrapped. If the nuclear power plant had been built and we were lucky enough not to have an earthquake that caused catastrophe, Dr. Sloan pointed out that by now the plant would be outdated and closed. Bodega Bay would suffer the same fate as Eureka with its own “abandoned hulk of radioactivity, a dangerous and immovable eyesore.”

Dr. Sloan took her organizing skills to San Francisco in 1965 and worked for the Friends Committee on Legislation, a lobbying group. A lifelong fascination with geology leads her to apply to the UC Berkeley geology masters program in 1971, when women were routinely discouraged from the field. Undaunted, she pursued geology, obtaining her MA in Geology in 1975 and her PhD in Paleontology (UC Berkeley) in 1981. Dr. Sloan headed up the then new environmental sciences undergraduate program at UC Berkeley, and over the next two decades she and her students made significant contributions to many local environmental causes, including preserving the wetlands of San Pablo Bay from developers. Now retired, Dr. Sloan is active in leading geological tours, working with the group “Citizens for East Shore Parks”, and wrote a book, *Geology of the San Francisco Bay Region* (2006).



Dr. Sloan’s presence at the Head was part of the Sonoma County Museum’s commemoration of the 50 year anniversary of the Hole in the Head. An excellent display is at the Museum (425 Seventh Street, Santa Rosa) through February 9, 2015. In addition to telling her stories about the nuclear plant protests, there was a fascinating tour focusing on the geology of the Bodega Head by Dr. Sloan and Dr. Matthew James, Professor of Geology and Chair of the Geology Department at Sonoma State University.

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What of the many other people who stepped forward to save Bodega Bay more than 50 years ago? I’ve been humbled to learn that, for many, their dedication to improving the human condition did not stop with their success in 1964. There are too many to list in this newsletter, and the stories are too wonderful to abbreviate. I invite you to our website to read more about this noble band of souls.