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Discovery of faults raises threat of New York quake

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NEW YORK — Recently identified faults under the East River have reawakened concern that, contrary to widespread belief, New York City may be vulnerable to moderately severe earthquakes, according to an authority on the geology of the New York area.

"New York City has always been considered safe from earthquakes, but that is now being reevaluated," said the expert, Dr. Charles Merquerian of Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y. Geologists, he added, are having to reconsider the "seismic potential" of the area.

While the city's high-rise buildings are not considered particularly vulnerable to earthquakes of moderate seve-

reity, this may not be true of other structures, such as the water tanks perched atop many older buildings. Merquerian said the earthquake potential should be taken into account in designing new structures.

He and Dr. Leonardo Seeber of Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Geological Observatory have been seeking evidence within the city for faults, or cracks produced by past movements in the earth's crust.

Three faults cross the city from northwest to southeast, as shown on maps of New York City's third water tunnel, now under construction.

One, known as the 125th Street Fault, enters Manhattan at about 125th Street, skirts the northeast corner of Central

Park and crosses the East River near the center of Roosevelt Island. Seeber has found a band of crushed rock where the water tunnel cuts across that fault on the East Side of Manhattan.

Another of these faults traverses the Inwood section of Manhattan and continues into the Bronx. A third, parallel to the others, lies farther north in the Bronx.

Additional faults have been identified running under the city from southwest to northeast, parallel to the Hudson Highlands, which cross the Hudson River in the vicinity of Bear Mountain and West Point. These faults also run parallel to Cameron's Lane, which extends from Massachusetts to New York City and marks a "suture" where formations

once widely separated were pushed together as the two sides of an ocean ancestral to the Atlantic converged some 400 million years ago.

Merquerian has found where that suture is crossed by the new subway tunnel from 63d Street in Manhattan to Long Island City, Queens.

None of the scientists who have examined the faults that are evident in the water tunnel or subway tunnel have reported any sign of recent activity.

Last October, New Yorkers were reminded that earthquakes occur in this city as well as in California when one rated at magnitude 4 on the Richter scale of severity occurred in Westchester County.