

All We Ask Is To Be Left Alone

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Abstract

Since the mid-19th century, disaffected citizens of California's far northern counties have conspired with their fellows in southern Oregon to break free from distant state governments and remedy by themselves the social and economic ills they blame, in part, on the relative unimportance the rest of their states attaches to them and their territory. Impoverished relative to the urban centers of Oregon and California, the Jeffersonians' sense of economic and political marginalization strengthens their connection to a regional identity. Jefferson's population today is at most just over half a million, a tiny fraction of California and Oregon. But the frustrations that motivated these iconoclasts to seek relief via threats of autonomy continue, and their experiences provide a window to understanding similar frustrations across the United States. The growing distrust of government, confusion about what constitutes a vibrant democracy, the rise of populist leaders—all factors on the national stage—are key themes in the regional story of Jefferson.

It is in the *Yreka Mountain Herald* where I've found the earliest recorded announcement of a secessionists' conspiracy in what's become known as the State of Jefferson. In the January 14, 1854 edition of the newspaper—less than four years after California became the 31st state and just over five years before Oregon became the 33rd—a notice headlined “Siskiyou Mass Meeting” called on citizens to meet in the Yreka Hotel that Saturday evening “for the purpose of taking measures to secure the formation at an early day of a new territory out of certain portions of Northern California and Southern Oregon” (*Yreka Mountain Herald*, 1854). A supportive adjacent letter to the editor argues in favor of the idea with a simple plea: “Let us then have a New Territory, and let power, civil and military, pass into hands who understand our wants and will, and let them wield it in subservitence [sic] to our wishes.”

Even before California became a state there were suggestions it should be cut into smaller political entities. And as relatively recently as 1978 the Assembly Bill 2929, introduced by Assemblyman Barry Keene (and cosponsored by 14 of his colleagues), called for the “consent of the Legislature” to the secession of much of the north part of the state. “The new state shall be known as ‘Alta California’ and shall consist of that territory lying north of a line representing the crest of the Tehachapi Mountain Range and extended therefrom west to the Pacific Ocean and east to the eastern boundary of the State of California,” read the bill’s legalize. “The State of California,” promised the legislators, “shall retain the name ‘California’ and shall consist of all territory south of the new state.”

The bill died, but a footnote to it adds some perspective to the history of dividing California. It reminds us that the first attempt was when California was still Mexican territory, back in 1825 (just four years after liberation from Spanish rule), and that despite the fact that most contemporary split talk is instigated in the north, southerners called for separation in 1852 on through 1859, and again in 1907. Another footnote to Barry Keene's state-splitting legacy is indicative of the distaste many of us from northern California feel for our southern Californian brethren. When Keen was asked about the locales for capital cities of the two Californias, he agreed that the north should keep Sacramento since it likely would fall in northern territory. As for the south, "That's their problem," he said. "I suggest Disneyland" (Di Leo & Smith, 1983, p. 165).

Today travelers racing up Interstate 5 toward Yreka from Sacramento and points south cannot miss the huge letters screaming "State of Jefferson" painted on the roof of a hay barn that faces oncoming freeway traffic (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The State of Jefferson barn located south of Yreka alongside Interstate 5 (photograph by Sara Matthews).

Unlike Yreka, Port Orford, Oregon, offers no obvious suggestion that it's a capital of Jefferson. Yet if there is any one character in this story who can stake a claim to being the George Washington of Jefferson it must be Port Orford's first mayor, Gilbert C. Gable—even though he died in 1941 just days before local boosters declared Jefferson free of California and Oregon. I've arrived at this fogbound, desolate-looking outpost in search of the character, or at least his legacy.

Jefferson legacy and history come alive in the squat Port Orford City Hall. A sign out front identifies that the "Mayor Gilbert E. Gables Council Chambers" is inside.

Inside is Mayor Gable's official portrait, a photograph hanging on the wall behind the city councilor's chairs, and centered between the American and Oregon flags. He looks almost movie-star-handsome, staring with what seems like melancholy acceptance at the camera, the wide suit coat lapels and slicked back hair both anchoring him in the late 1930s or early 1940s.

In a display case is a reminder of one of Gilbert Gable's earlier careers: an announcement from his agent, the Famous Speakers Bureau, saying that he is just back from the American Southwest and available to lecture for a fee. "Probably no living man has gone happily and delightfully through an experience more packed with spectacular achievement in explorations, scientific discoveries and the romance of pioneering adventure," exudes the brochure. It promises that Gable will tell stories of finding the world's largest trove of dinosaur tracks and a lost Indian city while finding time to experience "native religious rites as a brother of the tribe." The city hall tribute belies Mayor Gable's modest characterization of himself just a couple of days before he died as "the hick mayor of the Westernmost city of the United States" (Delaplaine, 1941b, p. 1).

Throughout the 1850s the Indians and white settlers fought over Jefferson land and its use. The settlers wanted to farm and mine the natives' ancestral home territories. When I returned to Eugene from my visit to Port Orford I sat in the somber special collections reading room in the University of Oregon's Knight Library, reading through the Cayuse, Yakima, and Rogue River Wars papers. The collection of original letters written by soldiers, politicians, businessmen and farmers brings the genocide perpetrated in my neighborhood into stark relief. As the library's own summary of its primary sources concludes, "Many tribal members succumbed to either military attack or disease, and most of the remaining populations were sent to live on reservations." The carefully preserved letters are a reminder that the settlers suffered, too. This was brutal war. There are letters to and from newspaperman and Oregon Territory Governor George L. Curry recounting details of ongoing conflict (an Indian massacre, an attack by settlers, stolen guns and animals). The correspondence makes the Wild West feel real and recent in the silence of the high-ceiled reading room.

I held a letter dated July 15, 1856 from Thomas Van Pelt to John K. Lamerick, a commander of the Oregon Volunteers. The elegant cursive is written in sepia ink. "We have to take up our rifles and go fighting again," he writes, because "the redskins are not satisfied or whipped." He recounts fighting in the Coast Range between Crescent City and Port Orford. "They were fired upon by a party of Indians and two of them were kild [sic] on the spot." Van Pelt reports his fast response. "I immediately raised 20 men," and they headed "to the place of the slaughter, and found and buried the bodies of the 2 men." Van Pelt offered his military expertise to the war effort in exchange for a commission with the Volunteers. "I have had considerable experience in fighting Indians. My manner of fighting has always bin [sic] successful." He calls on Lamerick to "attend to this business immediately and relieve your fellow citizens on the coast of southern Oregon. If you comply with this important request, I will raise the men. With very much respect I remain your humble servant."

While in Port Orford I secured appointments with two longtime prominent residents. Dolores Mayea, who informs me when I ask for a Sunday morning appointment to come anytime because "I don't go to church," and 93-year-old Lucille Douglass, who comes up with even a better line when I ask if we can meet. "I'm not going anywhere," she informs me.

Dolores Mayea lives along Garrison Lake, just a few blocks from the Highway 101 main drag through Port Orford—Oregon Street—and just east of the sand dunes that dominate so much of the Oregon coast. The lake was named for John B. Garrison, listed in some accounts as one of original pioneers who came to what was not yet known as Port Orford in 1851 aboard the steamer *Sea Gull* (and who escaped north after the attacks at Battle Rock) (CLR, 2014). Hers is a 1950s-style ranch house that would look comfortable anywhere in the American

suburbs. The mantle is lined with family photographs going back generations to a formal black and white study of her parents. Her father was born along the southern Oregon coast—a logger, rancher and land developer. Her mother moved west with her family from Idaho, looking for work. This has been Mayea’s home for 61 years, the place where she and her late husband raised five children—and all of them left Port Orford for lives lived elsewhere.

A handsome, robust woman in her mid-80s, Dolores Mayea leans back in what looks like it must be her favorite chair, the sparkling lake providing a backdrop over her shoulders and tells stories of a city that’s disappearing—no jobs and no next generation. The kids get out of high school and they skedaddle. “There isn’t any work here,” she laments. “There are no more mills. There’s no more anything. There’s some fishing. But the regulations are just getting worse and worse and worse all the time.” Her voice drops as she says with finality, “It’s sad.”

That seems an appropriate word for Port Orford: sad. One out-of-business storefront after another lines Oregon Street, jobs are few, and a brain and brawn drain all add up to sad times for Port Orford no matter how spectacular the countryside looks.

“In the ‘50s we had all kinds of businesses.” Mayea shows me a couple of old newspapers from those days, the pages jammed with display advertising for local businesses. “When our kids were growing up we had a couple of dress shops, a shoe store, two grocery stores, three gas stations, a men’s clothing store, restaurants. We had a wonderful drug store, and a variety store.”

“You could get what you needed without leaving town,” I offer.

“Right. It has changed,” she says with complete resignation, “considerably.” She expresses no expectation that those glory days will return. “Art galleries, that’s all we have anymore.”

“What’s it like,” I ask, “to see the place where you’ve lived all your life deteriorate?” Deteriorate is the correct word. There is nothing much compelling about the streetscape in Port Orford, unless your eye is lured by the desolate and the dilapidated.

“It’s sad,” she says again, a statement that seems odd given how delightful her home and its location appear. The devastated economy does not diminish the spectacular natural beauty of the place: soaring headlands, broad beaches, glorious sunsets (when the fog lifts!).

Mayor Gable and his contemporaries—and Mayea remembers the mayor from her childhood—wanted the government to build better roads in order to make exploitation of Jefferson’s minerals and timber more efficient.

“And we still don’t have adequate roads,” she tells me.

Across the highway from Dolores Mayea’s place and just down the street from the blue and white Grantland Mayfield Gallery is the faded glory of Lucille Douglass’s house. It’s a classic 19th-century Victorian-influenced two-story wood frame structure sorely in need of paint and repair, a lot of paint and repair. Lace curtains decorate some windows; one is boarded up with a piece of plywood. Weeds fill the yard; the porch is out of plumb.

Lucille Douglass invited me in, blaming her bent body on a fall down the stairs, and warning us from expecting to learn much from her because she suffers from Alzheimer’s disease. “The last two months,” she insists, her voice strong and clear, her hair white. “I’ve lost my memory. With my sister in Seattle, that’s all I talk about now. She thinks she’s going the same way. Alzheimer’s. A dirty word.” She titters, that’s the best word for the cynical laugh that follows her self-diagnosis. “Let’s get back to Mayor Gable,” she orders about our

interview, showing no overt signs of dementia and acting like a woman accustomed to being in charge.

“He was a doer,” she says about Gable, although she only remembers meeting him, not knowing him. “I think I was still in high school when they dedicated the new jetty down there.” That was 1935. “My memory is slipping. I’m going to use that as an excuse.” We’re sitting around a large dining table in a cluttered room. She points to a drawer and offers me the opportunity to root around in it. “That’s mom’s filing cabinet.”

The drawer is full of family papers: birth and death certificates, that sort of thing. And tucked away in the family history is a yellowing copy of the *Port Orford Post*, dated December 5, 1941—in fine shape except for a few crumbles and tears. “Mayor Gilbert Gable Dies Suddenly Here,” is the banner headline.

“Well, I’ll be darned,” she says, opening the paper and offering a “Whoops!” as a page of the yellowing artifact rips in her hands. “He succumbed to indigestion,” she reports after glancing at the obituary.

Hundreds of miles south, the *San Francisco Chronicle* scooped the *Post* by a day with news of the mayor’s demise. “I suppose I was the last newspaperman to interview him,” wrote the paper’s Stanton Delaplane (1941b), who was back at his *Chronicle* desk after writing the series of reports on the Jefferson secession movement that would win the Pulitzer Prize for him and his paper. “A friendly, warm talk,” Delaplane called his visit, “in a redwood cabin while the Oregon skies poured dark rain into the pine-covered hills.” Gable, he surmised, probably knew that Jefferson would never become an independent state, but figured the massive publicity generated by threats to secede could force Salem and Sacramento to be more responsive to Jefferson’s cries for help.

“The other night in Oregon,” Delaplane’s dispatch continued, “I accused him of being a romantic. I said, ‘I’m going to write that Gilbert Gable is watching the sun go down each evening over the Pacific with a golden dream in his eyes.’ And he laughed and said, ‘That’s newspaper stuff, all right.’ He died yesterday of acute indigestion,” Delaplane stuck with the official cause of death despite talk since of alcohol abuse, but added, “and perhaps he was too tense.” Referring to the national publicity Gable generated with his talk of Curry County secession from Oregon, Delaplane called the mayor “a pioneer who used the tools at hand to fulfill his dreams of the West as men a century ago used long rifles and axes to build the Nation. He had an historical future, not as a forty-ninth State Governor, but as one of the last pioneers.”

More than 70 years later, James Auburn is Port Orford mayor. His vision for his forlorn city does not mirror his predecessor’s, but as he fantasizes it to me, it sounds just as dreamy, just as far-fetched and just as—to be blunt—nuts. Mayor Auburn does not see Port Orford as a rival to Portland and San Francisco. He knows there is no potential at this most westerly municipality on the Lower 48 for a world-class city and a global port. Mayor Auburn fancies windswept, fogbound, still-isolated Port Orford as the next Carmel-by-the-Sea. Mayor Auburn, like Mayor Gable before him, is no rube. He is a physicist with a PhD from Oregon State University. He spent years in the Navy and working for Bell Laboratories back East before returning to Oregon and moving to Port Orford, the spot he chose years before as an ideal locale for retirement.

“I really fell in love with the place,” he explains.

But it's hard to imagine he researched much when he decided to equate Port Orford with Carmel. Port Orford is wetter each average year than Carmel by—dramatic pause—over 51 inches of rain (Weather Channel, 2014). And what about Carmel's fine dining, the gracious architecture, the elegant shops, the romantic ambiance, the beaches, the sun—the warmth?

“The town has changed quite a bit since then,” Mayor Auburn says thinking back to days when Gilbert Gable was the city's mayor. “I think back in the early 1940s we had more bars and saloons in town than we had churches and now it's reversed. We probably have more churches than bars.”

Of course I ask him why.

“It was a lumbering town back then,” he reminds me, noting the mills in the city that ran long hours, filled with thirsty workers. “There are no mills in town now.”

The 1941 Jefferson state escapade began in earnest October 2, 1941. A group of frustrated businessmen—inspired to act by Mayor Gable—addressed a session of the Curry County court at a meeting in Gold Beach, the county seat. The movers-and-shakers were seeking redress for their complaints about poor roads. Easy access to the county's natural resources—particular metals of value for the expected upcoming war effort—was impossible. The petitioners blamed the bad roads on disregard of Curry County by those Salem politicians representing the rest of Oregon. The court named a commission (Mayor Gable, of course, included) to study the complaints and Gable's attention-getting secession idea. The publicity-savvy mayor publically floated his brainstorm: join Curry County to California in hopes of getting better treatment from Sacramento than the passed-by county was getting from Salem. Culbert Olson, California's governor, was bemused when he heard the news, offering a sound bite that set the stage for the upcoming secession show when he said he was “glad to know they think enough of California to want to join it” (Oakland Tribune, 1941).

In Portland, the *Oregonian* mocked the news in an editorial titled “Curry Beware.” The newspaper warned of unintended consequences. “If ambition be realized, Curry would of course immediately acquire the glorious climate of California and become a haven for retired mid-west farmers; development of its mineral riches would add much more to the population. Gold Beach would become a metropolis with offensive slums, and Latin quarters, and traffic problems and police scandals and what not to cause dislike of it throughout the hinterland. Whereupon the hinterland would logically secede from Gold Beach.” The editorial concluded with a snide plea. “The Curry county plan to become a county of California is so full of potential disaster that once again its people are beseeched to pause and consider” (Oregonian, 1941).

Dismissing the public derision, a meeting was called for in Yreka. There Mayor Gable rallied representatives from Del Norte and Siskiyou counties on the California side to join what became his movement for independence now that Governor Olson had snubbed his overture to become a Californian. The Yreka Chamber of Commerce voted to study statehood for the loose alliance. Next on the statehood bandwagon was the local organization of young civic leaders, the Yreka 20-30 Club. Its members announced that the confederation would secede on Thursdays in “patriotic rebellion” against Oregon and California.

Enter Stanton Delaplane, the San Francisco scribe who knew that there are no slow news days, only slow news reporters.

Stanton Delaplane was a reporter in the tradition of that classic tale of newspapering, the Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur play, *The Front Page*. His was a world populated by figures like the fictional star reporter Hildy, who promised his fiancée in the Billy Wilder film version, “I’m going to cut out drinking and swearing and everything connected with the crazy newspaper business! Honey, I’ll never even read a newspaper.”

Bill German edited the newspaper’s stories about Mayor Gable and his nascent statehood movement. “I was one of Delaplane’s editors in the exciting year of 1941,” he told me when we met. I wanted editor German’s take on the rumor I’d been picking up that it was Delaplane who wrote the State of Jefferson’s famous “Proclamation of Independence” for the secessionists and that it was Delaplane who suggested that they throw a roadblock across Highway 99, both to help out the cause and to provide himself with good copy for the *Chronicle*.

The Jefferson series was the second Pulitzer Prize for the *Chronicle*. “There was no story there really,” is Bill German’s interpretation of the front-page splash the paper gave the Jefferson dispatches. “It was never going to happen,” he says about secession. “I knew Delaplane and I knew that whatever he was writing, two thirds of it probably was stuff he was making up.” It won the Pulitzer, German believes, because the Prize committee was looking for a story that had nothing to do with the expected war. The committee said otherwise, noting that it awarded Delaplane the prize for distinguished reportorial work during the year 1941.

“That winter was a very grim and sad time for America,” Bill German remembers. “The Japanese were going to land. We had a blackout every night. It was a lucky thing for the *Chronicle*,” he says about the prize, “and a wonderful thing for Delaplane.”

Not that German is necessarily being judgmental when he calls the bulk of Delaplane’s Jefferson reporting fiction. “He had a knack,” he adds with approval, calling Delaplane’s prose “shiny and wonderful” with a tone of voice I’m already beginning to recognize expresses German’s droll sense of humor, and which is augmented by an extra sparkle in his eyes. “He said he went up there and these people had no idea of how you promote something. Mayor Gable thought it was a great idea to give out the proclamation to motorists as they were crossing the border.”

I interrupt the retired editor. “You’re saying the roadblocks and the Proclamation of Independence were Delaplane’s ideas?”

“I can’t prove that,” he says. “But in interviews, he said that.”

Deep in the special collections of the Mill Valley, California, library, Delaplane himself checks in with details about his Pulitzer-winning escapades in Jefferson. The year is 1978, 37 years after he filed his dispatches from the north country (and 10 years before he died at his typewriter: his last *Chronicle* column was published that day). In October 1978 Delaplane sat for an interview with Mill Valley historian Carl Mosher.

“I began taking charge of it,” he told Mosher about the nascent secessionist movement. “I could see they needed little help.” As he talked with Mosher, Delaplane explained how he helped create the breaking story he was covering, calling it “a press agent kind of thing.” He called Mayor Gable “a simple, barefoot press agent [who] got himself elected mayor of Port Orford. He was press-agenting it,” Delaplane said about Gable’s initial calls for secession, “and I was press-agenting it. So we got together in a little cabin in a small town in Oregon” (Mosher, 1978).

Carl Mosher interrupted and suggested that the two compared notes that rainy night of talk and drink.

“Compared notes and decided how we would do it,” Delaplane agreed. The only thing the matter with it was he died the next day of a heart attack.” The newsman soberly analyzed what happened next. “It made for a very dramatic ending to a seven-day series, and I think that is what impressed the Pulitzer Prize committee.” The Jefferson secession, explained Delaplane, “was the kind of thing that I think appealed to them—the last frontier, the guys up there packing guns and things like that. It was the right place to be at the right time,” he said about his assignment to the story, “which is the most of anybody’s business: to be in the right place at the right time.”

The legend of the 1941 Jefferson movement is based on the Proclamation of Independence and on the Highway 99 roadblocks. In the interview with Mosher, Delaplane takes full credit for creating the headline-making elements of the news story he was sent to report.

The 1941 Proclamation of Independence remains popular throughout Jefferson. The handbills announced:

You are now entering Jefferson the 49th State of the Union.

Jefferson is now in patriotic rebellion against the States of California and Oregon.

This State has seceded from California and Oregon this Thursday, November 27, 1941.

Patriotic Jeffersonians intend to secede each Thursday until further notice.

For the next hundred miles as you drive along Highway 99, you are travelling parallel to the greatest copper belt in the Far West, seventy-five miles west of here.

The United States government needs this vital mineral. But gross neglect by California and Oregon deprives us of necessary roads to bring out copper ore.

If you don’t believe this, drive down the Klamath River highway and see for yourself. Take your chains, shovel and dynamite.

Until California and Oregon build a road into the copper country, Jefferson, as a defense-minded Sate, will be forced to rebel each Thursday and act as a separate State.

(Please carry this proclamation with you and pass them out on your way.)

The Proclamation of Independence was signed by the State of Jefferson Citizens Committee, which announced its temporary state capital: Yreka.

By November 29, 1941 the motley Jefferson players who formed the State of Jefferson Citizens Committee started taking themselves seriously, or so they said in a letter to officials in both Oregon and California, a letter demanding better roads. “Gentlemen you are playing with T.N.T.,” they wrote. “And we are serious.”

When Mayor Gable died he was calling himself “the acting chief executive of the new state” under authority he apparently granted to himself (Davis, 1952). The leadership void quickly was filled by another self-appointed guardian of the new state, California State Senator Randolph Collier. “Gilbert Gable would not want us to falter now,” he told anyone who would listen, “after the project he supported so long and so well was near success” (Wilson, 2005, p. 22). Senator Collier and other self-appointed Jefferson movers-and-shakers picked a retired Crescent City judge, John Childs, as their new “governor.” Judge Childs was experienced at the role of pseudo-governor. Back in 1935 he had organized leaders of neighboring counties to his own Del Norte who were frustrated by bad roads. They threatened secession from California to draw attention to their complaints.

The 1941 ad hoc State of Jefferson Citizens Committee decided to stage a secession parade through downtown Yreka and a rousing speech by “Governor” Childs at a rally in front of the courthouse. Or perhaps the newsreel crews sent to Jefferson from Hollywood directed the committee to organize the march and rally because their cameras needed the “news.” Which came first seems lost to memory and history. Aiding and abetting the carnival atmosphere was the *Siskiyou Daily News* and its coverage of the statehood movement. “Please attend the filming and be photographed,” cajoled the newspaper. “Please wear Western clothes if they are available. Parents are urged to bring their children. Two hundred people in western costumes will be selected to march past the cameras for close ups” (*Siskiyou Daily News*, 1941). Hundreds of locals responded to the paper’s call. They paraded with torches up Miner Street. They crowded in front of the courthouse to hear their new “governor” speak. Many obeyed the request that they wear Western clothes.

When I screen the scratchy old black-and-white remnants of newsreel footage, the parade and rally scenes look like the set of a Hollywood Western. In fact, that’s what they were. Former California State Historian W. N. Davis, Jr. called the entire show “a staged production.” He cites a newsreel cameraman shouting “Action!” *a la* Hollywood, followed by specific instructions to the players from the production’s director. “Get over there and be looking at the map,” the extras are told. A map of Jefferson was posted next to the speakers’ platform. “Don’t look at the camera!” As the cameras rolled, the orders continued. “Show a little enthusiasm. Wave your arms!” Hollywood knew what it wanted. “When the governor is introduced, throw you hats into the air!”

Despite the silliness on display, the grievances of the isolated counties were real and at least some of the actors began to believe their own secessionist propaganda. “Governor” Childs spoke for them when he concluded his inaugural speech with a rousing, “Yes, we’re in earnest about this matter of the State of Jefferson.”

The next day the *New York Times* soberly reported the story under the headline, “‘49th State’ Elects Its Own ‘Governor’.” The unnamed *Times* correspondent reported with a Yreka dateline, “Rebellious citizens of the five counties, angered by the failure of the two States to provide good roads and help promote the development of the mineral resources of the region, cheered the new ‘Governor’ as he delivered his acceptance speech on a platform flanked by a portrait of Thomas Jefferson and a map of the border counties” (*New York Times*, 1941).¹ The article describes a “flag-draped Main Street” and “pistol-belted miners” marching down it, many waving placards with legends that continue to be quoted by Jefferson enthusiasts: “Our

¹ Oregon’s Curry County, along with Siskiyou, Del Norte, Lassen, and Trinity counties in California, made up the 1941 version of Jefferson.

Roads Are Not Passable/Hardly Jackassable” and “The Last Frontier/Our Roads Are Paved With Promises.” With a dramatic flair that the newsreel manipulators could envy, the *Times* story reported, “Mountain horsemen barricaded the main highways once more to inform”—and here it quoted the Proclamation of Independence Stanton Delaplane took credit for writing—that Jefferson was in “patriotic rebellion.” The only hint in the 1941 *Times* story that the secession movement was theater comes in its last sentence, an acknowledgment that the late Mayor Gable conjured up the whole scheme. “A former New York and Philadelphia explorer and publicity man,” reports the paper, “he conceived the ‘secession’ movement as a regional advertising stunt.”

As the stunt snowballed, Delaplane reported that Jefferson merchants were talking about placing “good road” buckets next to their cash registers to stash sales tax revenue pennies, which would be seized by the new state if Oregon and California did not do more for Jefferson. “No more copper from Jefferson until Governor Olson drives over these roads and digs it out of Siskiyou” was the slogan today,” he reported (Delaplane, 1941a, p. 7). A telegram was dispatched to Governor Olson. “If California wants copper,” it said referring the three percent state sales tax, “they can come up here and dig for it. We have plenty” (Davies, 1941, p. 25).

“Governor” Childs embraced—at least in his public speeches—the notion that Jefferson would be better off without Salem and Sacramento. “The State of Jefferson is the natural division geographically, topographically and emotionally,” he announced. “In many ways it is a world unto itself,” he rhapsodized about his homeland, calling it “self-sufficient with enough water, fish, wildlife, farm, orchard land, mineral resources, and gumption to exist on its own” (Nolte 2001). No question that there was no gumption shortage.

Watching the newsreel footage is entertaining. At the side of the road is a sign delineating the Oregon California border—it’s not an official highway sign; it’s obviously been created for the photo op. A couple of cars (a sedan and a coupe with the rounded fenders, split windshields and streamlined look of the late 1930s and early ‘40s) cross in front of the sign. Five men costumed in that aforementioned Western clothing ride their horses toward the sign as two others on foot run into the frame with a rolled up replacement sign that they tack in place reading, of course, “State of Jefferson.” The horsemen dismount and they all cheer the sign, waving their hats and rifles triumphantly over their heads. Next the crew runs over to fetch their blockade. Another sign is staple-gunned in place: “Stop/State of Jefferson/Border Patrol” and it’s illustrated with the state seal’s double cross. Guns are drawn again—pistols and rifles—as a car approaches on cue and is stopped at the barricade. A “Proclamation of Independence” flyer is thrust in the passenger side window and as soon as it’s accepted the barricade swings aside. Suspension of disbelief for the viewer is just about impossible as cars speed up to the roadblock and slam on their brakes, the passengers taking the flyers as if such stops were routine, and the barricade swinging open just as soon as they grab the piece of paper.

Trucks spinning their wheels in mud show off the bad roads. The *Siskiyou Daily News* edition with the headline “Jefferson—51st State!” rolls off the press. At a Lions Club meeting the front page is held up for the assembled members, as is the double cross state seal painted on the gold pan. The crowd applauds. Collier hands the “governor” the state seal, and Childs holds it aloft. Next Judge Childs takes the leash of one of two bears brought to the carnival, Itchy and Scratchy. The newsreel boys must have been thrilled by the bear action.

Cut to the parade up Miner Street. “Oregon Forgot Us,” reads one sign. “Defense Needs Roads,” says another. Marchers carry torches, and one holds up a line drawing of Thomas Jefferson. “Give Us Roads or Else,” warns still another sign. There is a corps of uniformed

drum majorettes. Mud-splattered flatbed trucks filled with school kids waving still more signs as they ride up Miner Street, “V for Victory/Minerals for Defense/Money for Roads.” And the Sheriff’s Posse on horseback is the parade’s rear guard.

The newsreel shots from the courthouse lawn show a packed crowd, most of the men’s heads covered in typical 1940s-style fedoras. Judge Childs, dapper in a double-breasted suit with his white hair and wire-rimmed glasses, looks the part he’s playing: governor. He shakes hands with the other dignitaries, including Senator Randolph Collier, before he makes his rousing inauguration speech.

The black and white footage was never screened in theaters. Pearl Harbor was attacked before the film was processed, reproduced and distributed.

The 1941 protests continuing in Jefferson—whether frivolous or sincere (or both)—did not go unnoticed in Sacramento. One Fred W. Binks, the chief of the California Department of Finance Division of Budgets and Accounts, drafted a report titled *Fiscal Problems in the New State of Jefferson*, which he submitted to his boss on December 4, 1941, the same day Jeffersonians staged their torch lit parade in Yreka.

The financial picture painted by the economist is not a pretty one. “Independent status for the ‘State of Jefferson’ would be gained at the cost of luscious fiscal plums now enjoyed by the four California counties participating in this movement,” Binks concluded. His specific numbers are stark and question the vociferous complaints from the north country that Sacramento ignored Jefferson. “As a whole, these counties receive approximately \$1.32 from the State of California for each dollar paid in State taxes. In addition to this thirty-two cent direct bonus, the California ‘Jeffersonians’ receive free the multitude of general services provided by their present state government.” Binks listed access to higher courts, services of state departments such as Public Health, incarceration of Jefferson criminals in state prisons and the California Highway Patrol policing Jefferson roads all as representative examples. When he broke down the figures for each country, the balance sheet for Del Norte County (“Governor” Childs’ home) made the complaints of abandonment look ridiculous. For each dollar Del Norte sent south to Sacramento, the county enjoyed \$2.16 in services.

“All things considered,” reiterated Brinks, adding what sounds like a taste of urban arrogance, “the ‘State of Jefferson’ has made a rather good fiscal deal, whether the people there know it or not.” The report details several tax options Jefferson could consider to raise the funds needed to replicate services it then received from Sacramento, and argues why none is better than the status quo. “There seems to be only one tax capable of supporting the new State,” Brinks proclaims from his comfortable California state office building. “If the citizens of Jefferson could place a small tax upon the amusement which the people of California and Oregon are obtaining from their antics, the fiscal problems of the new Commonwealth would be solved for years to come.” Fred W. Binks: a bureaucrat with a sense of humor.

In a 2011 *New York Times* story about Riverside County Supervisor Jeff Stone talking up his idea to carve a South California out of the Golden State, Delaplaine’s Jefferson stunts are legitimized once again in the paper’s news pages for a new generation. With no hint of skepticism the paper reports, “The closest any campaign came to success was in 1941, when several counties in northern California and southern Oregon campaigned to form the state of Jefferson. At the time, the counties said they did not have enough roads and created a ‘Proclamation of Independence.’ But just as the movement was gaining traction, Pearl Harbor

was attacked and residents put aside their dreams for a new state to work on the war effort” (Medina, 2011, A18).

Yes, that was the official version from “Governor” Childs. He professed statesmanship when he announced that Jefferson statehood was on hold for the duration. “In view of the National emergency,” the “governor” proclaimed as his last official statement, “the acting officers of the provisional territory of Jefferson here and now discontinue any and all activities” (San Francisco Chronicle, 1941). He claimed that the plot to secede was a success because it drew attention to the region’s need for better roads. “We have accomplished that purpose,” he declared.

Baloney, Delaplaine told historian Carl Mosher. “They would have dribbled along with it,” he said about the Jefferson players and their zeal for the spotlight, “and if it had gone on,” he forecast about the escapade, “it would have gone downhill.” Walter B. Stafford, the editor of the *Siskiyou Daily News*, agreed. Stafford was responsible for the editorials advocating not just Jefferson but also the street theater that so intrigued the national audience. Yet on December 6, 1941, at a meeting of the amorphous citizens committee, he told his publicity-hungry colleagues it was time to shutter the show. “Next week,” he forecast, “someone else’s cat will be up a telegraph pole and getting all the publicity” (Davis, Jr., 1952, p. 135).

California State Historian W. N. Davis, Jr. studied the citizens committee and determined it was a loose amalgam—each member exerted whimsical pseudo authority “speaking his own mind to willing listeners, picked up and added to the ‘secession’ story. It is true,” he wrote in the *California Historical Society Quarterly* (1952), “by the time the movement reached its climax, a few of the promoters had shouted themselves into believing secession would be a good thing if it were constitutionally possible, but the feeling was nowhere widespread, as the press accounts would have one believe.”

We’ve been carving up our states since they were colonies. King Charles II gave the land that became Pennsylvania to William Penn in 1681 and he extended his reach to include Delaware. In 1776 Delaware not only signed the Declaration of Independence from the British Empire, it established itself as a state independent from Pennsylvania (Munroe, 1984). In 1764 the Crown gave Vermont to New York and in 1776 Vermonters asked the Continental Congress to admit them to the nascent nation as a separate state. New York objected and Vermont remained tied to its influential neighbor. A year later the tough Vermonters declared their independence from New York, but it wasn’t until 1790 that New York relinquished its claim, and it took until 1812 for the two states to agree on the boundary line between them (Morrissey, 1981). Maine started wrestling itself away from Massachusetts after the Revolution, but it took until 1820 for it to become part of the Union as a free state, while Missouri joined as a slave state. The Missouri Compromise added the two states without interfering with the nation’s balance of free versus slave states. West Virginians chose to remain in the Union when their neighbors seceded and attached their portion of the Old Dominion to the Confederacy.

Almost every state incubates some sort of Jefferson-like separatist movement. Residents of northern Minnesota, northern Wisconsin and the upper peninsula of Michigan talk of forming a state called Superior. They’ve been talking about it since the mid-1800s, a sure sign of that Superiorites of Finnish descent call *sisu*, courage and persistence (Twining, 1977).

In the early 1800s the Hudson’s Bay Company was referring to the Pacific Northwest as the Columbia District. Thomas Jefferson looked west and saw at the trading post that developed into Astoria, Oregon, “The germ of a great, free, and independent empire on that side of our

continent, and that liberty and self-government spreading from that side as well as from this side, will ensure their complete establishment over the whole” (Jefferson, 1813). It’s a quote Jeffersonians of all types like to seize as evidence of their independent heritage (often ignoring the slaughter with guns and disease that their land-grabbing immigrant precursors perpetrated on the vulnerable natives who they encountered during their Manifest Destiny-fueled march west across the American continent).

The year 1971 was a resurgent one for Jefferson. On the Oregon side, Josephine County Commissioner Kenneth W. Jackson traveled to a meeting of Oregon counties far across the state in Pendleton, carrying with him Jefferson T-shirts and a double cross flag. He promoted what would be—now that Alaska and Hawaii were part of the Union—the 51st state, advertising Grants Pass (his county seat) as its capital. Down in California at the same time, Siskiyou County Supervisor Earl Ager was remembering his days back in 1941, parading for Jefferson on the streets of Yreka. He agreed that the cause was still valid, but wanted the capital on the California side of the line (Rock, 1998). Supervisor Ager spouted radical goals for a Jefferson he proposed to lead as its first governor, and he insisted that—unlike the heritage of the 1941 action—his call for Jefferson was no “publicity stunt.” Vigilantes instead of police would be the answer to street criminals, he bragged. “The people of northern California and southern Oregon would take care of these sons of bitches. They wouldn’t need police.” This elected county official had ideas for those already tried and convicted of crimes. “There’s a lotta guys in prison that oughta be hung. If they hung ’em the first time they were put in prison they wouldn’t have to worry about putting them there a second time.”

Supervisor Ager’s target was not just the criminal justice system. He wanted to protect Jefferson’s natural resources from exploitation by southern California and northern Oregon. “I think we could pull our own weight in Jefferson just fine,” he told Redding newspaper reporter Garth Sanders, Jr. in November 1971, 30 years after “Governor” Childs in his inauguration address claimed such independence (Sanders, 1971, p. 1). “All we’d have to do is shut the water off to southern California and we’d have no problem bargaining with them.” Reporter Sanders helps us get a sense of Earl Ager’s personality. In his front-page story with its banner headline, Sanders tells us Supervisor Ager “snorted” and “snapped” his answers to questions, including the crucial, “Who should be the governor of Jefferson?”

“Me, that’s who!” he snorted and snapped.

In 1978 a depressed Klamath Falls turned to the Jefferson legend for help and staged the Jefferson State Stampede rodeo. The Oregon governor at the time, Vic Atiyeh, rode in the Main Street parade and joined Klamath Falls lawyer and longtime state legislator Harry Boivin for what the two called a summit meeting. Boivin was anointed governor of Jefferson for the duration of the rodeo. Klamath Falls funeral home director Jim Ward served as Jefferson secretary of state during the rodeo days. “It was just to try to get some business stirred up,” he said later. “The downtown area was slumping, and things were at a dead end here” (Kepple, 2000, p. 1).

On California Street in Jacksonville I sit myself down on a bench and study the red brick United States Hotel across the street. Built in 1880, the building is elegantly restored and for sale for just under \$1.5 million. The United States Hotel sits on the site of what was the Union Hotel, the locale where that meeting called by the *Yreka Herald* “for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of organizing a new territory (to be called Jackson), and

to devise means to effect the same” occurred on January 7, 1854 (Sutton, 1965, p. 56). Long before Jefferson there was Jackson.

On this summer evening, the 19th-century buildings lining the few blocks of downtown Jacksonville sparkle. Except for the automobiles and the tourists, it’s easy for me to sit on the bench and daydream, imagining the movers-and-shakers back in 1854 at a boisterous gathering, resolved to carve their own political entity out of their piece of Oregon and California. They agreed on language for a protest to Congress, part of their campaign to create Jackson Territory. “Resolved,” they wrote, “that we will use every exertion to prevent the formation of a state government in Oregon with its present boundaries” (Sutton, 1965, p. 56).

A leading Oregon politician at the time was General Joseph Lane. Lane was territorial governor and Oregon’s delegate to Congress. His son-in-law, Lafayette Mosher, presided over the Jackson Territory organizing meeting. But General Lane was a pragmatist and he refused to back the Jackson movement. The general, who earned his stars fighting in the Mexican-American War, was a Southern transplant to the Pacific Northwest. Son-in-law Mosher was an alleged member of the Western Division of the Knights of the Golden Circle (Watson, 1989, p. 3C), a secret society that promoted slavery. The combination of Lane’s Southern roots and slavery sympathies fueled fears that the Jacksonites wanted to create a slave state on the West Coast. General Lane worried that the Jackson Territory campaign would interfere with his grander goal of statehood for the Oregon Territory. The natives who lived on and from the land the settlers were mining were harassing gold prospectors along the Rogue River and armed conflicts between settlers and natives distracted the early separatists. The Jackson Territory faded to black.

General Lane saddled up his warhorse once again and led volunteers in the vicious Rogue River Indian Wars of 1855 and 1856. He was wounded in the battle of Evans Creek, “felled by a Minié ball in his right shoulder” (Campbell, 2010). Several hours later the Rogues fighting Lane’s volunteers yelled for a ceasefire. Lane, along with interpreters, met them on the battlefield and the two sides scheduled talks. “The Indians, as soon as our firing ceased,” wrote one of Lane’s soldiers later, “carried out water to our wounded men, and furnished a party to assist in conveying the litters with our wounded for 25 miles, through the mountains” (Beckham, 1971, p. 121). Treaty talks presided over by Lane a couple of weeks after the battle resulted in the Rogue River Indians agreeing to peace in exchange for their land. The Indians were granted a temporary reservation on the north side of the Rogue. That peace ended when white settlers fighting under a flag labeled with the word “Extermination,” and who called themselves the “Exterminators,” surprise attacked one of the Indian camps, killing about two dozen men, women, and children. The massacre—led by a settler named James Lupton—provoked the final battles of the Rogue River Indian Wars. Lupton died at the scene, an arrow through his lungs. His legacy: the cowardly assault and murders are known to history as Lupton’s Massacre (LaLande, 2014). Indians retaliated, but they eventually were outgunned. The white settlers were reinforced when a platoon of Army soldiers joined the fight. Those soldiers were not expecting to fight in what became the toughest battle of the Rogue River wars. They were a detail of engineers, assigned to carve a route through the rugged coast range from Port Orford to the inland Applegate Trail—the beginnings of the bad Jefferson roads Mayor Gilbert Gable was campaigning to improve with his initial call for secession. Known as the Battle of Hungry Hill, the location of the pivotal fight was confirmed by Southern Oregon University archaeologists in late 2012 when field work uncovered unfired .69 caliber musket balls of the type that were used in the Springfield muskets issued to Army dragoons in 1855

(Register Guard, 2012). The Rogue River Indian Wars finally ended when the indigenous tribes who lived around Jacksonville were forced far from their ancestral homelands—the *ur*-Jefferson—and off to a reservation west of Salem (LaLande, 2014).

When Oregon became a state in 1859, its borders included Jacksonville and one of its first two senators was Joseph Lane. His Oregon political career collapsed after he unsuccessfully ran for vice president of the United States in 1860 on a pro-slavery ticket with presidential candidate John C. Breckenridge. Lane's term in the Senate ended in 1861 and he moved home to Roseburg, along the Umpqua River, on the northern border of most Jefferson maps (Douthit, 1995).

The State of Jefferson charade resurfaced most recently when the Siskiyou and Modoc County Board of Supervisors voted in 2013 to secede from California.

"We just don't seem to have any control over our government," Siskiyou Supervisor Marcia Armstrong fumed as she voted to leave the Golden State.

Armstrong and her rebel colleagues can vote to form a new state as often as they wish, of course. A vote for statehood may make them popular with some of their constituents. It may make them feel giddy, powerful and connected to the colorful local history of southern Oregon and northern California.

But what Jeffersonians ought to know by now is that they will never carve a new state out of the wilds between Roseburg and Redding.

My wager is that Armstrong and the other supervisors know their US Constitution. Creating a new state out of the existing one requires approval from Sacramento (and Salem, if counties on the Oregon side of the line accept Siskiyou and Modoc's invitation to join them), along with an okay from the politicians in Washington, DC.

Every few years since, a creative manipulator such as Supervisor Armstrong gins up the Jefferson story—knowing full well, one would hope, that the 38 million people in the rest of California never would allow the handful up in Jefferson to depart with their precious water and pristine wilderness playground.

Armstrong and the others must realize that Democrats in a pretty much equally divided Washington would never accept two new senators from what would be a red state with a smaller population than my college crossroads Eugene.

And as a supervisor she must read her county's budget: More funds still come north from Sacramento to pay the bills for roads and social services in Jefferson than go south as taxes.

There are legitimate complaints throughout Jefferson. Contested water rights, endangered fisheries and unresolved land use disputes combine with an inadequate job market.

The result is discontent in what should be a paradise. The conflicts alienate neighbors: native peoples, descendants of Oregon Trail-era settlers, and recent equity-flight urban immigrants. But the political tools for dealing with these problems exist within the region's operative political structures.

Pretending that statehood would solve them is a sideshow.

That the elusive State of Jefferson resurfaces from time to time is a good thing. It allows peeved locals to air complaints even as it offers an entertaining story that the rest of us can relate to—we all, at one time or another, want to fight city hall.

But the Jefferson story needs new life. It's not enough to keep recycling the same old thing. After spending a year wandering around its back roads and talking with its citizens, I'd like to offer Jefferson an idea that will brighten the spotlight Armstrong and others seek.

Jefferson is somewhat mundane for a state name. I propose the Jeffersonians jettison Jefferson and call their place in the sun (and often the rain) Garbo. Once retired from acting, Greta Garbo became famous for wanting to be left alone. Aggrieved Jeffersonians say they want to be left alone.

Garbo has a nice ring to it—enigmatic, private, with a wry nod to celebrity. For a place where history, in fact and fancy, was created by the deft use of publicity, the name Garbo would put bland Jefferson in headlines around the world. Imagine the intrigue inherent in places with names such as Ashland, Garbo, and Grants Pass, Garbo, and especially Eureka, Garbo.

Garbo, an ideal name for a place that just wants to be left alone.

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