

Altered States

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze

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At the end of my column, I always mention that my home is in northernmost California. This is true—except on Thursdays. Then I live in the 51st state, the State of Jefferson.

State of Defiance

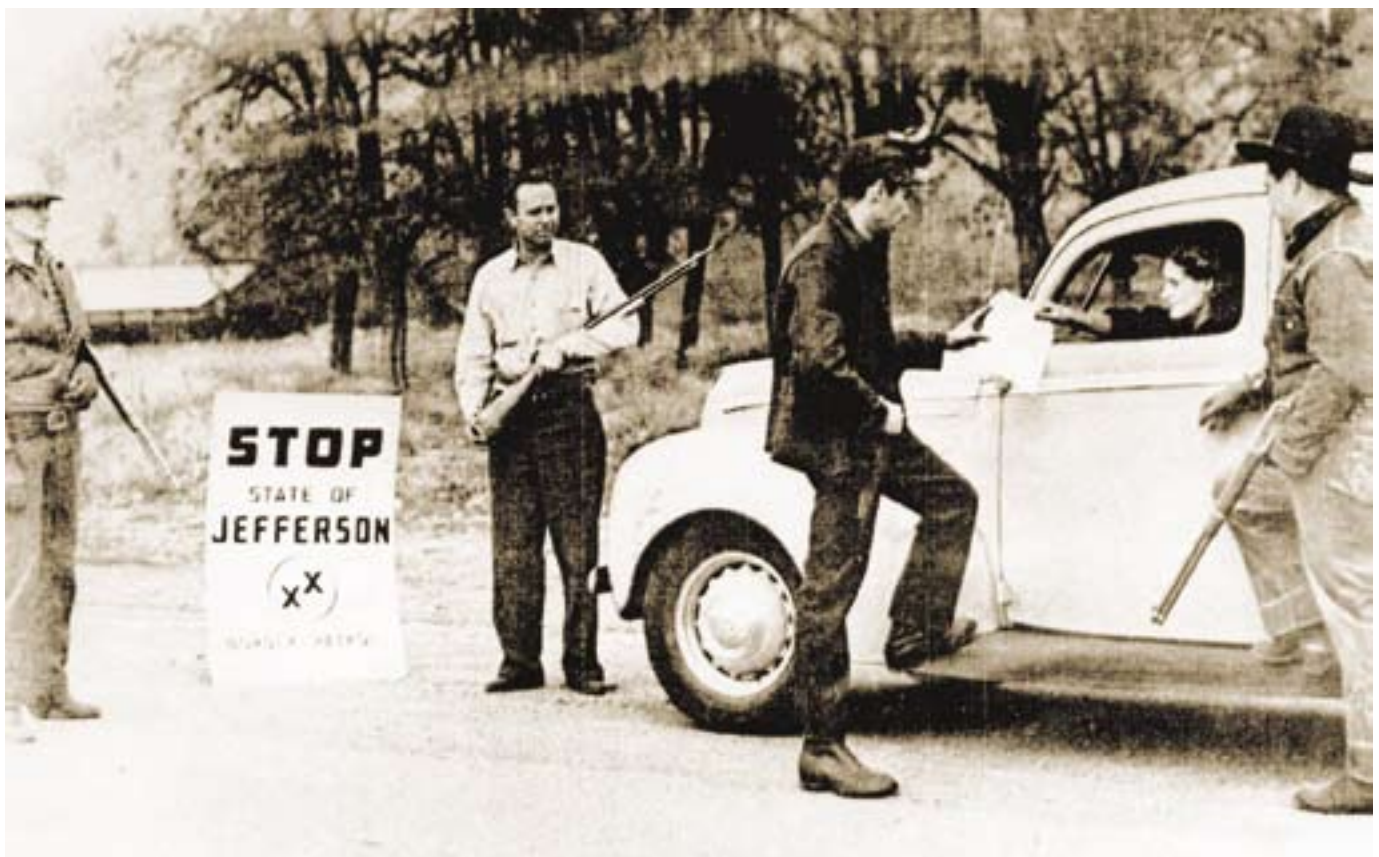
In 1852, a bill was introduced in the California Legislature to create a new state made up of parts of northern California and southern Oregon. The new state was to be called “State of Klamath.” The bill died in committee.

Throughout the years, this idea of forming a new state was visited several times by politicians of both states. The years 1853, 1854, 1856, 1859, 1877, 1878, 1882, 1909, and 1935 had all seen various movements for secession, each with their own map of the proposed new state.

Residents in the counties of northernmost California and southern Oregon have always felt that they have not been well represented by their state governments in Sacramento and Salem, respectively. These areas have had their vast natural resources depleted to fill the needs of the more populated areas. Meanwhile, neither state government has responded to the needs of this region with any knowledge or real concern.

In 1935, Judge John C. Childs of Crescent City in Del Norte County, California, declared himself governor of the good-humored Jefferson Secessionist movement. By bringing attention to the movement and his geographic location, he was somewhat successful in getting the roads along the Redwood Coast improved.

State of Jefferson roadblock on Highway 99, November 1941.



Courtesy Siskiyou County Historical Society

Another man, Gilbert E. Gable, became Mayor of Port Orford, in Curry County, Oregon. He soon heard of the "State of Jefferson," and realized that its "citizens" agreed with his views. On October 2, 1941, his case for a new state was presented before a county judge. The judge approved the proposal and started a study of the procedure for the formation of a new state comprised of Curry, Josephine, and Jackson counties of Oregon; and Del Norte, Siskiyou, and Modoc counties of California.

A meeting was held in Yreka, California, on November 17, 1941, to discuss the development of a six-county alliance to promote the mineral and timber resources in northern California and southern Oregon. People in Yreka embraced this idea.

The next day, the Yreka Chamber of Commerce voted to investigate the formation of this new state. The Chamber of Commerce wanted to name the state "Mittlewestcoastia." But the Yreka newspaper decided to hold a contest to find a different name for the new state. The responses included such names as Orofino, Bonanza, Del Curiskiyou, Siskardelmo, New West, New Hope, Discontent, and Jefferson.

"The State of Jefferson" was the winning entry, as announced several days later. The *San Francisco Examiner* published some of Gable's proposals. The new state would be free of obnoxious taxes—no sales tax, no liquor tax, and no income tax. Gable also considered slot machines unfair competition for the local stud poker industry and wanted them outlawed.

That same week, Yreka was designated the temporary state capitol and the seal of the State of Jefferson was created. The seal is a gold mining pan etched with two Xs. This was to illustrate that the populace had been "double-crossed" by Salem and Sacramento. The movement gained national attention. A young reporter named Stanton Delaplane was dispatched from the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He arrived in Yreka on November 26.

On this same day, the citizen's committee issued their Proclamation of Independence. This was sent to California's Governor Olson. They also set up a roadblock on Highway

Bob-O models his secessionist wardrobe that he wears on Thursdays.



Proclamation of Independence

You are now entering the State of Jefferson, the 49th State of the Union. [Ed. note: Hawaii and Alaska were not yet admitted to statehood.] Jefferson is now in patriotic rebellion against the states of California and Oregon. The 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 traveling 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 the 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 State, 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.

—State of Jefferson Citizens Committee
Temporary State Capitol, Yreka

This 1941 Proclamation handbill was handed out to travelers through the region.

99. Armed with target pistols and deer rifles, they handed out red and blue windshield stickers, which read, "I have visited Jefferson, the 49th state." They also dispensed yellow handbills of their Proclamation.

The Promised Land

The State of Jefferson took a blow on December 2, 1941, when Gilbert Gable died suddenly. Flags were flown at half-mast throughout Jefferson. The *Yreka Daily News* claimed, "Hizzoner was one smart cookie." Ten minutes after being informed of his death, the Siskiyou Board of Supervisors voted to carry on the work he had started.

Mr. Delaplane of the *Chronicle* continued to send articles from Yreka to the newspaper's head office in San Francisco. One caption read, "The Yreka Rebellion: Why Is It Growing?—Our Scout Tries to Reach Grants Pass Highway—He's Still Stuck Halfway!"

On December 4th, an election was held in Yreka and John C. Childs was inaugurated as governor of Jefferson. *Time* and *Life* magazines sent photographers to cover the event. Four Hollywood newsreel companies filmed the ceremony and parade.

The torchlight parade that evening was festooned with signs proclaiming "California forgot us," "Our roads are not passable, hardly jackassable," "If our roads you would travel, bring your own gravel," and "The promised land—our roads are paved with promises." On December 8, 1941, the newsreels were to be released in theaters across the United States.

Under Attack

On December 7th, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and brought the United States into World War II. Governor Childs' last official act was to release this statement:

In view of the national emergency, the acting officers of the Provisional Territory of Jefferson here and now discontinue any and all activities. The State of Jefferson was originated for the sole purpose of calling attention of the proper authorities...to the fact that we have immense deposits of strategic and necessary defense minerals and that we need roads to develop them. We have accomplished that purpose and henceforth all of our efforts will be directed toward assisting our States and Federal Government in defense of our country.

—*San Francisco Chronicle*, December 9, 1941

If at First You Don't Secede...

All was quiet for years, and then in the mid-sixties, the Josephine County Historical Society published *The Mythical State of Jefferson*. The Jefferson State name started showing up in businesses. The local public radio station changed its name to Jefferson Public Radio in 1990. Their magazine *Jefferson Monthly* goes out to members living within their 60,000 square miles of broadcast area in Southern Oregon and Northern California.

Local business entities include the State of Jefferson Radio Amateurs Ham Directory, Jefferson Lock and Key, Jefferson State Plumbing Company, Jefferson State Mortgage, Jefferson State Pest Control, and Jefferson State Sanitation Company. Many, many vehicle license plate holders proudly announce "Resident of the State of Jefferson" in the borderlands of Oregon and California.

Recently, when I was wearing my "State of Jefferson" hat at a garden show in Medford, Oregon, a man stopped me and asked where I had gotten it. "Down in Yreka, the state capital, at the hardware store on Miner Street," I replied. Bob-O and I have also designed and printed T-shirts for ourselves and friends, so we can have complete secessionist wardrobe ensembles.

Secession and the State of Jefferson are now more of an attitude than a serious movement. The basic problems with Salem and Sacramento still exist. But we'll never be able to outvote the population centers of our respective states. It wasn't that long ago that this pioneering country was wild and woolly. That spirit of independence lives on in the hearts of all Jeffersonians.

Access

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