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# UC SANTA BARBARA

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**The Staging of Jefferson:  
Gilbert Gable, Stanton Delaplane, and the 1941 Jefferson Statehood Movement**

*Charlie Borah*<sup>1</sup>

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**Jefferson's Slow Birth: 90 Years in the Making**

Far from the western metropolises of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Portland lie the rugged coastline, evergreen forests, and high deserts of southern Oregon and northern California. The region, vastly different from the urban centers, is included in the respective states due to the vast size of the West; the residents often find themselves disconnected from and forgotten by the state governments in Salem and Sacramento. In 1941, the malcontent residents of southern Oregon and northern California launched a plan to finally self-govern as they saw fit. Calling themselves Jeffersonians, the citizens launched what was, in their eyes, a patriotic rebellion against their state governments in a quest to split off and become the 49th state.

The Thursday, 27 November 1941 edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle* featured a headline demanding, all capitalized, that the United States “ANSWER TO JAPAN!”<sup>2</sup> by intervening militarily against the Japanese to stop letting them wage war against whichever countries they pleased. However, in the midst of what was then the Second Sino-Japanese War and eventually became World War II, Japan was not occupying the most prominent part of the front page. The headliner article about Japan was shoved in the far-left column of the paper. The article with the most dedicated space on the busy front page was “Secession Snowball: ‘It’s No Joke -- We Need Some Good Roads!’”<sup>3</sup> The author of this story about a stunning political development was not a seasoned reporter on the California State Assembly or other political machines in the state but was instead a fresh, thirty-four-year-old travel reporter: Stanton Delaplane. Delaplane was not reporting on the burgeoning movement as it happened, but a note entitled “The Reason for the Story” within the article explained that the 27 November article was actually “the first of a series of stories he will write on the secession counties.”<sup>4</sup> It certainly seems curious that such an important story, about an attempted breakaway state, was reported on in a planned series instead of as it happened. That is unless the story was more staged than real.

The idea of southern Oregon and northern California declaring independence from their state governments was not new in 1941. Separatist movements had been around since California joined the Union in 1850. In 1852, an influx of gold miners to northern California created a significant center of political power outside of Sacramento that led to multiple attempts at the passage of a proposal

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<sup>1</sup> Charlie graduated from the University of Vermont in December 2021, with a degree in History and a minor in English. He enjoys researching the history of the American West and has written on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, and now, the State of Jefferson.

<sup>2</sup> Royce Brier, “ANSWER TO JAPAN!,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 November, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Stanton Delaplane, “Secession Snowball: ‘It’s No Joke -- We Need Some Good Roads!’,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 November 1941, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Delaplane, “Secession Snowball,” p. 1.

splitting California into two states. That year, the creation of a northern state of Shasta was proposed and killed in the California State Assembly.<sup>5</sup> In 1853 and 1854, the state legislature debated a proposal to split off the northern half of the state and turn it into the state of Klamath, which was slated to include an annexed portion of the southern part of the then-Oregon Territory. An 1854 statehood convention drew local support, but the plan was nixed by legislators elsewhere in the country. Joseph Lane, the Oregon Territory's Congressional delegate, accused the Californians of hypocrisy and stated that they "don't think of entertaining the idea of clipping their state"<sup>6</sup> but were nevertheless willing to take part in the Oregon Territory.

It is important to note that these movements, from 1851 to 1941, marketed themselves in varying ways. Some used the term secession more liberally; others strictly stuck to calling themselves statehood movements. It led to some confusion, but there was never a serious movement in southern Oregon and northern California to create an independent country; the movements advocated just for their statehood or, less frequently, to join the other state. These movements were part of California's formative years when the borders seemed up for debate as a young state. Later, as California's borders were firmly established and after Oregon's 1859 admission to the Union, the separatist movements became more attention-seeking than legitimate proposals. In 1909 and 1910, the northern California and southern Oregon independence movement reared its head once again. They renamed the proposed state Siskiyou and sought to market their proposal with the support of the Jackson County Press Association as a way to bring business to the region. This movement, despite letter-writing campaigns and general support in the media, eventually ran out of steam and was the last significant independence movement until the 1941 Jefferson movement, which two men spearheaded: Gilbert Gable, the cosmopolitan East Coast transplant and mayor of Port Orford Oregon, and Stanton Delaplane, the San Francisco travel writer credited with bringing Irish coffee to the United States. Gable and Delaplane's involvement in the 1941 Jefferson movement was largely self-serving and used the widespread anger of citizens to benefit themselves.

Jeff Lalande, a professor at Southern Oregon University, is intimately involved with the history of Jefferson. In a 2017 article for the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, entitled "'The State of Jefferson': A Disaffected Region's 160-Year Search for Identity,"<sup>7</sup> Lalande details the long history of the Jeffersonian movement, and the piece was instrumental in influencing my thinking on the subject. Lalande's article laid the groundwork for my writing and was the first to bring to my attention the possibility that the movement was not as organic as one would think. Lalande's article broadly covers the history of Jefferson to examine the mindsets of the people in the region but does not focus closely on Gable and Delaplane. Other scholarship touches on various aspects of Jefferson. This includes its place among other breakaway state movements,<sup>8</sup> reminisces on the movement and Gable and Delaplane's roles through the eyes of Jeffersonians alive during the events of 1941.<sup>9</sup> Another examines

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<sup>5</sup> Jeff Lalande, "'The State of Jefferson': A Disaffected Region's 160-Year Search for Identity," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 118, no. 1 (2017): pp. 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> LaLande, "A Disaffected Region," pp. 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> LaLande, "A Disaffected Region."

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Fox, "New State Movements, 1900-2013," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 36, (2014).

<sup>9</sup> Peter Laufer, "All We Ask Is To Be Left Alone," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 36, (2014).



the geographical composition of Jefferson, which is inextricably linked with the demands for a breakaway state.<sup>10</sup> This piece draws upon the prior scholarship and strives to combine two central facts of the 1941 Jefferson movement: citizens of the region were unhappy with their treatment by the federal and state governments, as well as the true story of the movement, which is that Delaplaine and Gable played up and embraced the movement for their purposes: increased wealth and political power for Gable, and a long-sought Pulitzer for Delaplaine.

### **Creating Jefferson: The Men Who Made a Movement**

Gilbert Gable was well-traveled before he became mayor of Port Orford. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1886, he forwent college to do publicity for Bell Telephone before heading Liberty Loan drives during World War I. Following the war, he explored the American West and uncovered dinosaur tracks and an ancient Indigenous village in Arizona before finally settling in Port Orford in 1935 with lofty goals.<sup>11</sup>

Ever the worldly man, Gable dreamed of making Port Orford the West Coast's only deepwater port between Puget Sound and San Francisco. Gable opened a sawmill in Port Orford and developed a residential neighborhood before wowing the Orfordians by getting the town incorporated. He was rewarded for this by being elected mayor of tiny Port Orford, with a population of a mere 300 people. Gable spent liberally on the harbor upgrade, with total costs of around \$750,000 (more than \$14 million in 2021) for the dock, administrative building, and another lumber mill. In September 1935, Oregon's miserly governor, Charles Martin, attended the dedication of the harbor, where Gable, in a rare moment of humility, declared, "I find myself shrinking into microscopic tininess beside the influence and the commerce we here set in motion."<sup>12</sup> The next day, he was granted permission by the Interstate Commerce Commission to build a ninety-mile railroad connecting Port Orford to Leland, an inland town connected to the Southern Pacific line. Gable had struck gold. He intended to use the rail line to transport timber and various precious ores that were to be extracted from the southern Oregon mountainsides.

Gable's plans were often more show than substance, which was the case with his harbor and railroad. His harbor, shoddily built, was destroyed in a winter storm just three months after its dedication. His railroad, technically approved, was slow to begin construction, and Gable was incensed. In an appearance before the Interstate Commerce Commission, a now-defunct federal railroad regulation agency, he announced a plan to fund the railroad on his own, so long as the ICC granted him a certificate of convenience and necessity. Unable to present any proof of funding and refusing to name his backers, Gable was denied. The Oregon Railroad Commission similarly turned him down. These defeats became a sore spot for Gable and created a sense of disillusionment with the bureaucracy that governed the vast public lands in Curry County, home to Port Orford.

If Gilbert Gable was a worldly man, then Stanton Delaplaine must have been universal. Delaplaine was born in Chicago, Illinois, in October 1907, where he attended high school before

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew A. Derrick, "The State of Jefferson: Beyond Myth and Mindset, Toward Enhanced Conceptualization of a Region," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 36, (2014).

<sup>11</sup> "Gable's Gold Coast," *Time Magazine*, 4 April, 1938, pp. 60.

<sup>12</sup> "Gable's Gold Coast," p. 62.

moving west to California to finish his education.<sup>13</sup> He began his career in journalism at twenty-six when he joined *Apéritif Magazine*, a San Francisco arts and culture magazine, as a writer. When *Apéritif* stopped publication in 1936, three years after he started working there, he headed over to the *San Francisco Chronicle* to serve as a reporter and travel writer, a job he held for more than fifty years until his death in 1988 at the age of eighty.

Delaplane never turned down a good adventure throughout his long career and often created adventure where there was none. In Mexico, writing for his “Postcards” travel series for the *Chronicle*, he hunted for the long-lost head of Mexican revolutionary leader Pancho Villa.<sup>14</sup> In the Shannon, Ireland airport, he discovered Irish coffee, which he excitedly brought back to San Francisco and, as legend has it, sampled so many different versions at a friend’s San Francisco bar that he nearly passed out on the cable car tracks.<sup>15</sup> In 1954, the American Society of Beau Brummell’s named him one of the twenty best-dressed men in the country. A surprising honor considering his color-blindness, which frequently resulted in him wearing mismatched socks.<sup>16</sup> Delaplane and Gable were seemingly a match made in heaven. Amazingly, the Pulitzer Prize he won in 1942 for reporting on the state of the Jefferson movement came relatively early in his career, less than a decade after he started in journalism. Delaplane was always on the hunt for a fascinating story with eccentric characters, and in 1941, he stumbled upon one such story in his own backyard. Mayor Gable sensed the opportunity and was more than happy to play the main character. Despite Delaplane and Gable’s self-serving involvements with the movement, it was by no means inorganic, and the secessionists had a laundry list of legitimate complaints with California and Oregon.

The complaints can largely be pinned on the four governors who served before the 1941 movement: Charles Martin and Charles Sprague in Oregon and Frank Merriam and Culbert Olson in California. Governor Martin of Oregon, who had attended Gable’s harbor opening, served as governor from 1935 to 1939 with a decidedly anti-government and pro-business slant. Before becoming governor, he served in Congress. He used his position on Capitol Hill to convince President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to direct New Deal funds to Bonneville Dam and Timberline Lodge, massive projects close to the state’s northern population center Portland. In Congress, Martin was certainly sympathetic to the New Deal but never once cast a vote on New Deal legislation during the legislative marathon that was President Roosevelt’s first one hundred days. Any love he may have had for the New Deal ran out once he was elected governor. As governor, he refused to fully restore the

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<sup>13</sup> Sam G. Riley, *Biographical Dictionary of American Newspaper Columnists*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 72-73.

<sup>14</sup> Tim O’Rourke, “Chronicle Covers: ‘The Adventure of Pancho Villa’s Missing Head,’” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 16 July, 2016, [https://www.sfchronicle.com/chronicle\\_vault/article/Chronicle-Covers-The-Adventure-of-Pancho-8355520.php](https://www.sfchronicle.com/chronicle_vault/article/Chronicle-Covers-The-Adventure-of-Pancho-8355520.php).

<sup>15</sup> Carl Nolte, “The Man Who Brought Irish Coffee to America,” *SFGATE*, November 9, 2008, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/The-man-who-brought-Irish-coffee-to-America-3185886.php>.

<sup>16</sup> “Obituaries: Stanton Delaplane; Award-Winning Travel Columnist,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1988, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-04-19-mn-1055-story.html>.

wages of state employees, who had suffered a fifty percent pay cut during the Great Depression. He raged about striking timber workers, accusing them of attempting to embarrass him. He railed against government relief and welfare programs as products of a nation run by “Jew Communists.”<sup>17</sup> He declared that he planned to have more than ninety percent of the residents of the Fairview Home, a government-run facility for the developmentally disabled, put to death to balance the state budget. Martin was certainly not the sort of governor who would invest in developing southern Oregon. His successor, Charles Sprague, was far more willing to wield the power of the government but used his power to enact long-term, environmentally focused regulations instead of the infrastructure investments that southern Oregonians desperately wanted.

In Governor Sprague’s inaugural address to the Oregon State Legislature in January 1939, he declared, “I am convinced that the wise handling of natural forest lands calls for their consolidation under public ownership.”<sup>18</sup> Sprague established conservation practices to require reforestation after timber harvesting operations, mandating that loggers leave a set number of seed trees, reseed, or replant the logged land. Sprague also established the state forest system, which set aside land for preservation and limited logging.<sup>19</sup> These regulations were certainly beneficial to the long-term health of Oregon’s forests. However, they added to the general dissatisfaction of the residents of underdeveloped southern Oregon, who wanted development, such as roads, logging, and mining, and believed that such infrastructure was long overdue. The gubernatorial situation in Sacramento was equally bleak for the development-obsessed Jeffersonians.

Frank Merriam, elected governor of California in 1934, began his term facing a shrinking state budget and growing deficit. In response, Merriam, a Republican, had the state legislature enact California’s first state income tax.<sup>20</sup> The new tax was not met with any substantially increased government investment in northern California, as the tax was enacted to cover Great Depression-era deficits. Merriam’s support for relatively high taxation and troubled relationships with unions did not do him any favors with California’s conservatives or liberals, respectively. In the 1938 general election, he lost by eight points to Culbert Olson, who became the first Democrat to serve as governor of California in over four decades. Olson, an ardent supporter of New Deal-style economic policies, had the potential to be northern California’s saving grace. However, he certainly did not do himself any favors with the rural northern believers when he refused to say, “so help me God,” instead of declaring, “I will affirm” while taking his oath of office.<sup>21</sup> His gubernatorial agenda was chock full of government spending with the potential to rejuvenate northern California. However, conservative

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<sup>17</sup> Gary Murrell, *Iron Pants: Oregon’s Anti-New Deal Governor, Charles Henry Martin*. (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 2000), p. 171.

<sup>18</sup> Robert M Bruce and Charles A Sprague, “Interview: Governor Charles A. Sprague Describes His Administration’s Proudest Achievement,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (1987): p. 404.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce and Sprague, “Interview,” p. 405.

<sup>20</sup> Marvel M Stockwell, “The State Income Tax in California,” *The Bulletin of the National Tax Association* 31, no. 9 (1946): pp. 271-283.

<sup>21</sup> Debra Deane Olson, “Why California’s Godless Governor Was Ahead of His Time,” *Zócalo Public Square*, 30 May, 2018, <https://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2018/05/29/californias-godless-governor-ahead-time/ideas/essay/>.

Democrats sliced almost \$100 million off his first budget, quashing programs such as universal healthcare and a proposal to distribute public power from Shasta Dam, less than one hundred miles from the California and Oregon border.<sup>22</sup> The southern Oregonians' and northern Californians' gripes were legitimate, as years of neglect had fostered a disdain for their far-flung state governments.

Even today, almost eighty years after the 1941 statehood push, the flag of the State of Jefferson far outnumbers state flags in southern Oregon and northern California. The flag is green, with a circular yellow seal in the middle. Around the circle's rim are the words, "The Great Seal of State of Jefferson," with every letter capitalized. Inside the circle are two black, offset Xs to signify how their state governments had double-crossed the Jeffersonians. The flag likely has the most longevity of anything to come out of the shockingly short 1941 movement—it was a two-week-long movement that changed the region forever.

### **The Rise and Fall of Jefferson**

The 28 November report on the state of Jefferson dubbed the Jefferson statehood movement: "The Yreka Rebellion."<sup>23</sup> It explained that "rough-shirted miners with pistols buckled on their belts, barricaded the main highway north and south tonight, declared 'patriotic independence' from California and Oregon and dared Governor Olson to collect the penny sales tax."<sup>24</sup> Drivers along the highway were stopped, issued pamphlets containing the Jeffersonians' declaration of independence, and told to distribute them as they continued down the road. The declaration of independence read, in full:

You are now entering Jefferson, the 49th State of the Union.  
 Jefferson is now in a patriotic rebellion against the States of California and Oregon.  
 This State has seceded from California and Oregon this Thursday, 27 November, 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, 75 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 see for yourself. Take your chains and 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.)<sup>25</sup>

In one picture from the roadblock, armed Jeffersonians in cowboy hats and dirty clothes handed a

<sup>22</sup> "Olson's Luck," *Time Magazine*, 3 July, 1939, pp. 10-11.

<sup>23</sup> Stanton Delaplane, "The Yreka Rebellion: Highway is Barricaded by Gun-Toting Miners; Olson Told to 'Dig' for Sales Tax," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 November, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Delaplane, "Highway is Barricaded," p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Delaplane, "Highway is Barricaded," p. 7.

copy of the declaration of independence to a supposed tourist dressed in a fur coat. However, it was not noted that the stopped woman was none other than Miriam Moore, Stanton Delaplane's then-fiancée.<sup>26</sup> Another suspiciously timed development on 27 November was Lassen County's pledge to join the fledgling movement. Wiring the Jefferson Citizens' Committee, Lassen County declared, "We offer to bring in the only active volcano in the continental United States, Mount Lassen."<sup>27</sup> In their quest for statehood, Lassen's wire brought them together with California's Del Norte, Siskiyou, and Modoc counties and Oregon's Curry County.

Elsewhere in the proposed Jefferson territory, a march was staged in Yreka. A Yreka newspaper instructed potential marchers to "wear Western clothes if they are available" for a chance to become one of the "two hundred people in Western costumes...selected to march past the camera for close-ups."<sup>28</sup> Film crews sensed the impending story and scrambled to send crews to Yreka. Once on-site, they directed marchers to look at maps, not look at the cameras, complained about the overabundance of children in their shots, and encouraged their subjects to look more excited about the statehood movement. To outsiders around Oregon, California, and the rest of the country, the movement looked shocking and real. This was due in no small part to Delaplane, who, despite witnessing the marchers being directed by film crews, chose not to report the occurrence.

The Jefferson statehood movement was supported by the workers of the would-be state of Jefferson, especially the copper miners who were sitting on massive deposits that could not be reached by trucks for extraction. The Klamath River Highway ran 150 miles from inland Yreka to Crescent City, just a few miles south of the Oregon border on the Pacific coast. The road was largely undeveloped and made mineral extraction nearly impossible. One truck driver who frequented the road recounted an anecdote about a fellow driver transporting a steam shovel, being forced to stop his truck and detonate some dynamite to remove part of a hill blocking his path. Miners also shared a common gripe with the Jeffersonians: They were being forgotten in favor of the state population centers. One miner declared, "If this was Los Angeles County, they'd have the roads in no time. They've got the votes, but we've got the copper."<sup>29</sup> There was quite a contrast on 27 November 1941. In one part of the proposed splinter state was a highly orchestrated declaration of independence and march designed by powerful men in the movement for publicity. Elsewhere, in the areas that the state of Jefferson promised to represent, there were miners, citizens' committees, and truckers declaring their support for the breakaway.

In Delaplane's third article on the state of Jefferson, on 29 November 1941, he escalated his antics once again, taking to the Klamath River Highway himself to see just how bad the roads were

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Farley, "The Pulitzer Prize And The State of Jefferson," *Thomas Farley's Blog*, 26 February, 2020,

<https://thomasfarleyblog.com/2020/02/26/the-pulitzer-prize-and-the-state-of-jefferson/>.

<sup>27</sup> Delaplane, "Highway is Barricaded," p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Finn J.D. John, "Port Orford P.R. wizard managed Jefferson secession like a movie," *Offbeat Oregon*, 12 October, 2014,

<https://offbeatoregon.com/1410b.308.state-o-jefferson-part2.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Delaplane, "Yreka Rebellion," p. 7.

and, as his article title declared, getting “stuck halfway!”<sup>30</sup> To drive home his point, he wrote that a miner cheerily advised him that if he took the trip through the poorly maintained highway, “they would probably find my bones by spring all right and give them a decent burial.”<sup>31</sup> Delaplane’s reporting had entered a new stage. Delaplane had switched from passively reporting on events secretly staged for publicity to actively insert himself into the news story by traveling the treacherous highway. He was finally going to put his interactions with Gilbert Gable in the written record. He noted that his reason for traveling the dangerous, snowy highway was that he was heading to visit Mayor Gable, “instigator of the secession movement.”<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere in California, reactions to the secession movement were varied. An editorial published in the *Santa Cruz News* humorously proposed that Santa Cruz County, south of San Francisco, secede from California and join Portugal.<sup>33</sup> Members of the state government were less amused.

State officials at the California Department of Public Works and California Department of Natural Resources were incensed at claims that the Jeffersonian counties did not have adequately funded infrastructure. A state highway engineer pointed out that California had already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on highways in Del Norte, Siskiyou, and Modoc counties and had apportioned another \$400,000 in the 1941 through 1943 budget for highway construction. Other state highway officials went so far as to pin blame for poor road qualities on the local officials who, they charged, were responsible for maintenance. Charles Averill, an engineer in the mines division of the Department of Natural Resources, accused the secession counties of exaggerating the value of their natural resources and assigned the federal government responsibility for surveying said resources. Another official from the Department of Natural Resources said, “just as quickly as those and other counties show that they have something to justify development, they’ll get action from federal and state governments.” However, the Department of Natural Resources admitted there were substantial copper deposits that were not being extracted.

The Californian government certainly was not alone in its distaste for the secessionists. When rumors of the statehood movement first cropped up in October 1941, the Portland-based *Oregonian* published a derisive article sarcastically declaring that, should Curry County leave Oregon, the county “would of course immediately acquire the glorious climate of California and become a haven for retired mid-west farmers.”<sup>34</sup> *The Oregonian*, which in 1941 still declared itself to be a Republican newspaper, was not a fan of Gilbert Gable’s showy displays of insolence to Republican governor Charles Sprague. Gable had sent an open letter to Governor Sprague demanding to know what “‘actual mineral development’ the state ever made in Curry County, what improvements the state has made to Port Orford harbor, and why the governor has not obtained for Curry County some of the millions

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<sup>30</sup> Stanton Delaplane, “The Yreka Rebellion: Why Is It Growing? --- Our Scout Tries to Reach the Grants Pass Highway --- and He’s Still Stuck Halfway!,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 November, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Delaplane, “Why Is It Growing?,” p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Delaplane, “Why Is It Growing?,” p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> “Secede? -- Santa Cruz Leans Toward the Portuguese,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 November, 1941, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> “Curry, Beware!,” *The Oregonian*, 4 October, 1941, p. 6.

newly appropriated by congress for defense roads.”<sup>35</sup> *The Oregonian* ran defense for the state government, writing that the “state has never engaged in actual mineral development anywhere in Oregon, or in improving harbors anywhere in Oregon, and the new defense road appropriation is imaginary on the mayor’s part.”<sup>36</sup> It was a brutal smackdown from a paper that had, just the paragraph before, accused Gable of “harshly and oratically”<sup>37</sup> making demands of Governor Sprague. Perhaps sniffing out Gilbert Gable’s publicity stunt before it even began, the article ended by coldly stating that “the mayor has ceased to be funny.”<sup>38</sup> *The Oregonian* article went on to poke real holes in Gable’s scheme. The duties that Gable accused the state of neglecting were not the state’s duties, at least according to *The Oregonian*. It was a big strike against Gable’s integrity as a leader of the movement that many of the desired infrastructure projects were either not the state’s responsibility or based on imaginary funding information in the case of the defense road. Regardless, *The Oregonian* article, published on 20 November, did little to slow Gable on his quest for a state of Jefferson, as the movement launched a little more than a week later.

Delaplane’s write-up of Gilbert Gable is surreal, as Delaplane repeatedly implies that Gable’s Jefferson scheme is little more than a personal ploy. To Delaplane’s readers, Gable was the “sparkplug that is setting the new world on fire.” However, to the Jeffersonians, Gable presented himself as the “hick Mayor of the Westernmost city of the United States.”<sup>39</sup> Gable’s next move after the secession displays was to call a provisional state legislature to meet, composed of the citizens’ committees from the seceding counties. The mayor boasted to Delaplane about receiving almost two dozen letters and telegrams from investors intrigued by the Jeffersonians’ claims of limitless copper, chrome, and other minerals in Curry County. Delaplane nearly gave away the game in response, predicting that “a few more stories and Gable won’t need the OPM money he has demanded of Washington.”<sup>40</sup> There it was summed up in one offhand remark: Delaplane and Gable were in cahoots, and the Jefferson project benefited them both. For Delaplane - “a few more” stories - was not a big ask for a man whose articles were being reproduced as wire reports in *The New York Times* and about which buzz of a potential Pulitzer Prize circulated. He later won this award for his reporting on the state of Jefferson. Similarly, Mayor Gable, a real estate developer and owner of a sawmill who stood to benefit handsomely from investment in Curry County, was certainly not going to decline the money of free-spending private investors who wanted to start digging.

Gable made himself the de facto chief executive of the Jefferson movement from the beginning and made a series of contradictory executive orders to local newspapers. Gable, advocating for increased funding to the region to build roads and extract minerals, informed the papers and citizens that any state of Jefferson he was governor of was not going to have a sales tax, income tax, or liquor tax. How he was going to fund roads and infrastructure was left a mystery. Gable, ever the

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<sup>35</sup> “Fun from Wonderland,” *The Oregonian*, 20 November, 1941, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> “Fun from Wonderland,” p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> “Fun from Wonderland,” p. 10

<sup>38</sup> “Fun from Wonderland,” p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Stanton Delaplane, “Secession Land’s Publicity Man: ‘This Is The Promised Land of Broken Promises,’” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 November, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Delaplane, “Secession Land’s Publicity Man,” p. 12.

businessman, also declared that he intended to outlaw the practice of striking within Jefferson. In an article about the Jefferson movement, Finn J.D. John noted that this was “no big surprise coming from the guy who owned almost all Curry County industry.”<sup>41</sup>

The two Xs on the proposed Jefferson state flag that signifies how California and Oregon double-crossed their rural regions could well have been four after Gable and Delaplane’s betrayals during the 1941 movement. The movement for a state composed of southern Oregon and northern California was long and storied. The people, according to Delaplane, were “serious about it. They write scorching letters on both sides of the question to their newspapers. They are mining men and lumber men, and they, and their fathers before them, were born here.”<sup>42</sup> That was a stark contrast to the men tasked with leading and promoting the movement: a decently wealthy Philadelphian who had made Port Orford and Jefferson his pet projects and a San Francisco travel writer. On 1 December 1941, Floyd Healey, a reporter with decades of experience at the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Los Angeles Times*, took over writing about the Jefferson statehood movement since Delaplane’s four article series had concluded with the previous day’s article about Gable. The article’s tone changed immediately, from Delaplane’s detailed descriptions and repeated insertion of himself into the story to Healey’s dry writing about minute details of the relationship between unions and the Jefferson movement. Delaplane’s vivid descriptions of the statehood movement were not that way just because he was enthusiastic about his job but because he was involved with the statehood movement’s planning and execution.

In the article above on Jefferson, Lalande provided a damning indictment of Delaplane, writing that the *Chronicle* reporter “actively participated in the unfolding story by suggesting, urging, and apparently choreographing”<sup>43</sup> events like the roadblock and a torch-lit parade in Yreka. Interestingly, Lalande said that the leading energy behind the movement came from businessmen and politicians, not the citizens, whom he argued “dutifully showed up as extras.”<sup>44</sup> Lalande seemed to be only speaking of how citizens supported the specific Gable-led movement because citizens were absolutely in support of the idea of a state of Jefferson. They repeatedly lamented to Delaplane about how mistreated they were by their state governments, how the citizens and their natural resources were forgotten and expressed envy of the coddling that big cities like Los Angeles received. By the end of November, feelings were varied about the Jefferson movement. Some viewed it entirely seriously, others viewed it as a simple publicity stunt, and to others, it was just some laughable grumblings from the perpetually displeased rural folks. Even Delaplane’s newspaper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, mocked the Jefferson statehood movement. In one section of the 2 December edition, a cartoon spider named Mimi asked a cartoon mouse, “you know what happened to the last Jefferson that tried to secede,” before declaring that it was Jefferson Davis, much to her amusement.<sup>45</sup> On the morning of 2 December, *San Francisco Chronicle* readers read that quip about Jefferson. By that night,

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<sup>41</sup> John, “Port Orford P.R. Wizard Managed Jefferson Secession Like a Movie.”

<sup>42</sup> Delaplane, “Secession Land’s Publicity Man,” p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Jeff Lalande, “‘The State of Jefferson’: A Disaffected Region’s 160-Year Search for Identity,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 118, no. 1 (2017): p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Lalande, “The State of Jefferson,” p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> “The Weather,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2 December, 1941, p. 1.



Gilbert Gable, the leader of the statehood movement, was dead of a heart attack.

Gable died as he lived: on the front page of newspapers. His death was a massive blow to the Jeffersonian movement as he was a leading favorite to become the governor or a Congressman for the proposed state. On 3 December, Delaplane returned to his Jefferson reporting to eulogize the late mayor and the state of Jefferson. Delaplane declared that Gable was a man “whose historical importance was yet to come” and lamented that he “left a great idea unfinished.”<sup>46</sup> Delaplane also continued his trend of exposing Gable’s true character. While Delaplane certainly was not writing maliciously about his good friend, Delaplane was more interested in the story than the fact that he was revealing his and Gable’s phony roles in the statehood movement. In two damning paragraphs, Delaplane wrote:

Gable was never what he claimed to be: “A hick Mayor of a Western Coast town.” He was a smooth, cosmopolitan product with clothes cut by a New York tailor and an acquaintance list built up from 11 years as a public relations man for Bell Telephone Company in Philadelphia.

For the dramatics of it, he liked to pose as just a small town Mayor. Gable probably knew that his 49th State and secession movement would never be accomplished. But he knew the weakness of State Legislatures, the pin pricks of adverse publicity, and he used them neatly.<sup>47</sup>

Just days before, Delaplane had presented Jefferson as a great populist movement, with Gable, its brave leader, guiding the citizens on their quest for statehood. Delaplane’s tone had shifted dramatically a day after Gable’s death. Gable and Delaplane spent the evening together on the night of 1 December, comparing notes and game planning how exactly to discuss the movement and the massive regional and national attention it was drawing. Delaplane expressed his hopes of winning a Pulitzer. At the same time, Gable believed the movement would get him the railroad capable of opening up southwest Oregon for development and, in turn, making him handsomely wealthy.<sup>48</sup> Delaplane had planned and staged multiple events with Gable to legitimize the state of Jefferson but was trying to distance himself from that, declaring that it was never going to be accomplished. Delaplane also played it off as a political ploy to get more money from the state legislatures. While Gable was almost certainly leading the movement to get investments in Port Orford and the surrounding areas, either from the government or private investors, that was not the message he conveyed to the angry citizens of northern California and southern Oregon who desired to start their own state.

Neither Delaplane’s words nor Gable’s death dampened enthusiasm for the statehood movement. On 4 December, two days after Gable’s untimely death, the citizens of the planned state converged on Yreka, California, the proposed capital, to elect a provisional governor. The late Gable had been seen as a frontrunner in the gubernatorial race, but the citizens elected Judge John Childs as their governor in his absence. It was a celebratory day in Yreka, as the town leaned into its status as

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<sup>46</sup> Stanton Delaplane, “Mayor Gable, 49th State Leader, Dies,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 December, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Delaplane, “Mayor Gable,” p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> John, “Port Orford P.R. Wizard Managed Jefferson Secession Like a Movie.”

the secession capital of America. Schools let the kids out early to join in the celebrations, and the streets were decorated with bunting and state of Jefferson flags. The author of that day's *San Francisco Chronicle* article about the festivities was not named. However, they struck a similar tone to Delaplaine, declaring, "Whether copper is brought out of the snowy Siskiyou or not, Yreka was hitting top Christmas business, with packed restaurants, stores, and hotels."<sup>49</sup> The inauguration was the second occurrence of the weekly secession events that had started the week prior with the roadblock. Governor Childs gave a fiery inauguration speech, exhorting the crowd to continue supporting the statehood movement and to demand better of their governors. He invoked the Bible, quoting 1 Kings 12:16, to summarize the plight of the Jeffersonians: "So when all Israel saw that the King hearkened not unto them, the people answered the King, saying 'What portion have we in David?'... So Israel departed unto their tents."<sup>50</sup> Governor Childs implied that the Jeffersonians were the chosen people, but their state governors had still turned their backs on them, so they needed to create their own homeland. It was a dramatic and rapid shift from Gable's freewheeling and exuberant advocacy for their own state to Childs' emotional biblical invocation.

The new governor's commitment to the state of Jefferson was noted in the 6 December 1941 issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. That day the paper reported that many of the revelers from the inaugural party awoke with hangovers, but not Governor Childs. Childs was reportedly well-rested and immediately got to work on real legislative solutions. One of his first acts was to proclaim that the federal government must rectify a tax imbalance caused by the vast public lands in the planned Jefferson territory. Childs said this created an unfair tax burden on private property holders near the public lands, as the federal government was not paying tax on its land. Governor Childs also declared his intention to immediately begin negotiations with the California government on funding for roads into the state's northern interior to extract timber and minerals.<sup>51</sup> Childs was a longtime resident of northern California and was tuned in to the political workings of the state, not simply a loud-talking firebrand like Gable. Unfortunately for the supporters of Jefferson, Childs' governorship did not last long.

The 6 December 1941 issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle* was the final issue of the year to mention the statehood movement as a legitimate political movement. The 7 December 1941 was, in the solemn words of President Roosevelt, a "day that will live in infamy"<sup>52</sup> as the Japanese military launched a massive surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The next day the paper made no mention of Jefferson, the rebellious countryfolk replaced by a massive, entirely capitalized headline that proclaimed: "U.S. AT WAR!"<sup>53</sup> The attack's death toll eventually was determined to be 2,403

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<sup>49</sup> "Jefferson Inaugurates a Governor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 December, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> "Jefferson Inaugurates a Governor," p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> "Governor' Takes Up the Tax Problem," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 December, 1941, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "December 7, 1941— A Date Which Will Live in Infamy"— Address to the Congress Asking That a State of War Be Declared Between the United States and Japan," (speech, Washington D.C., 8 December, 1941).

<https://www.loc.gov/item/afccal000483/>.

<sup>53</sup> "U.S. AT WAR! PARATROOPS LAND IN PHILIPPINES!" *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 December, 1941, p. 1.

people, but at the time of the *Chronicle's* morning publication, only 350 of those deaths were known. Even with the partial count, the response was still resounding. The paper's editorial board took out a small box on the front page to implore Americans to unite. The board wrote that "The time for debate has passed, and the time for action has come. That action must be united and unanimous. 'Politics is adjourned.'"<sup>54</sup> The advocates for a state of Jefferson felt similarly, immediately moving to disband the effort. Governor Childs announced that the weekly secession activities, planned every Thursday indefinitely, were to cease immediately and proclaimed, "In the view of the National emergency, the acting officers of the provisional territory of Jefferson here and now discontinue any and all activities."<sup>55</sup> The plucky Jeffersonians and previously front-page headlines were relegated to the paper's sixteenth page. Childs, who had been firing up crowds in Yreka for independence just days before, sought to make peace with state officials and pledged support. He announced that,

the State of Jefferson was originated for the sole purpose of calling the attention of the proper authorities... to the fact we have immense deposits of strategic and necessary defense materials... We have accomplished that purpose and henceforth all of our efforts will be directed toward assisting our States and Federal Governments.<sup>56</sup>

Childs was attempting to back down from the audacious calls for statehood as the country worked to rally for what was surely going to be a brutal war. As part of the defense funding authorized during World War II, some of the roads called for during the statehood movement were constructed. Across the region, committees once dedicated to supporting the statehood cause issued statements of loyalty and unity with their states and the United States. The story was dead.

### Jefferson's Legacy

The movement, however, was not dead. Despite Gable's death and Delaplane's declaration that the statehood movement was over, the same problems that caused the movement in the first place persisted and were finally being discussed in the media and statehouses. The Jeffersonians were serious about their loyalty pledges, and the movement was nearly nonexistent during World War II. Since then, it has flared on various occasions, and the twenty-first century has brought a sustained movement for statehood with it. The complaints remain similar today. The modern Jefferson movement, represented by the State of Jefferson Formation group, is primarily composed of Californians. They continue to feel that the California state government does not adequately represent the northern portion of the state. While the movement has taken a significant shift towards a libertarian ideology, they still call for full utilization of the region's natural resources. They continue to believe that the region's tax obligations are out of proportion with the lack of services it receives and that the region is massively underrepresented.<sup>57</sup> Mark Baird, a member of the Siskiyou County Committee of the Jeffersonian statehood movement, even channeled Governor Childs' biblical invocation in a speech explaining why the state of Jefferson was necessary. He compared the plight of the statehood activists to that of the Israelites in Biblical Egypt, held as slaves by a Pharaoh, foreign

<sup>54</sup> "America at War!" *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 December, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> "War With Japan Stops Agitation For 49th State," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 December, 1941, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> "War With Japan Stops Agitation For 49th State," p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> "Issues," State of Jefferson, <https://soj51.org/issues/>.

to them, who did not care for the Israelites. Said Baird, “when the Pharaoh did not let them go, they did something about it.”<sup>58</sup> He encourages his audience to follow suit.

The modern Jefferson movement does not seem particularly interested in reckoning with Gilbert Gable and Stanton Delaplane’s legacy, even though the brief 1941 movement was when the proposed state finally got the name Jefferson, selected in a newspaper poll in honor of the third president. The State of Jefferson Formation website mentions neither the mayor nor the journalist. Gilbert Gable maintains a certain favorability in Port Orford, where the residents appreciate his successful drive to incorporate the city. However, outside the small coastal town, the men’s legacies are nonfactors in the modern movement. Perhaps it is fitting that Gable and Delaplane, who began the movement in search of worldly possessions like awards and money, have faded from the movement’s memory.

Today, anyone looking to travel from either of California’s biggest cities, San Francisco or Los Angeles, to Portland, Oregon, will find that the fastest route by car is to take Interstate 5 directly through Yreka, California. Less than ten minutes before entering Jefferson’s proposed capital, an eighty-foot-long, open-air barn sits near the side of the road. Overlaid on the barn roof is a white wrap cut out, so the corrugated steel left visible reads “State of Jefferson,” and under the roof’s cover lies a massive quantity of neatly stacked bales of hay. It is unlikely that the rural farmer who owns the building has much in common with Gilbert Gable or Stanton Delaplane other than a shared desire for a state of Jefferson and a piece of common knowledge: it is important to make hay while the sun shines.

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<sup>58</sup> Jefferson Declaration, “A Long Train of Abuses,” YouTube video, 3:35, 23 June, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qDRFQoB44A>.