

Two Californias? A Split Decision

More Than 100 Attempts Have Been Made to Divide State

By CHARLES HILLINGER,
Times Staff Writer

ARCATA, Calif.—It was more than 45 years ago that motorists in extreme Northern California and Southern Oregon were stopped at roadblocks and handed copies of a proclamation of independence for a new state called Jefferson.

Irrked because they believed that the California and Oregon state governments were ignoring their sparsely populated counties, county supervisors on both sides of the state line decided to secede. But the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, blew that movement out of the water.

Form a State

It was far from being the first—or the last—secession drive in California.

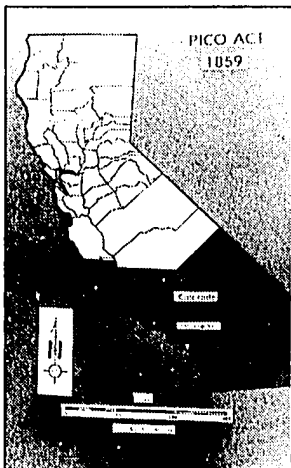
The effort to form the state of Jefferson, said Humboldt State University ombudsman and history teacher Stan Mottaz as he sat with his maps on his patio here, was only one of more than 100 attempts "by politicians or groups dissatisfied over something" to divide California.

Mottaz, 48, who became intrigued as a Cal State Long Beach undergraduate in 1965 when then-state Sen. Richard Dolwig (R-San Mateo) introduced a measure to split the state in two, has written articles and lectured on the subject. His maps show various proposals, many introduced in the Legislature, to chop California into two or even three states.

The Short Shrift

From statehood in 1850 to shortly after the turn of the century, Mottaz noted, nearly all attempts to split the state were initiated in Southern California. "The political power base was in San Francisco then and Southern Californians thought they were getting the short shrift.

"But ever since the population explosion in Southern California,



Pico Act placed Los Angeles in new state named Colorado.

beginning about 1915, attempts to divide the state have all been initiated in the north, several over the water issue," the historian said.

When Dolwig submitted his plan in 1965, Mottaz began to poke through the history books, finding little or nothing on the numerous division movements. Eventually, he did his master's thesis on the 1941 drive to form the State of Jefferson.

Yreka Declared Capital

Resolutions in favor of seceding to form Jefferson were passed by the boards of supervisors of Lassen, Siskiyou, Trinity, Del Norte counties in California and Curry County in Oregon, Mottaz said. Humboldt and Modoc counties in California as well as Josephine and Jackson counties in Oregon expressed interest.

The proclamation of independence, declaring that Jefferson was the 49th state, put the capital at Yreka, in California a few miles

south of the Oregon line.

Mayor Gilbert Gable of Port Orford, Ore., who conceived the idea for the new state, was designated governor. A huge rally was scheduled for Dec. 4, 1941, in Yreka. Gable died a couple of days before the rally and John L. Childs, a retired Crescent City judge, was named Gable's successor as governor designate.

"The two states treated the secession movement as a joke," Mottaz said. "California Gov. Culbert L. Olson had met with Gable and suggested the counties involved get together and form a regional commission to work toward developing the area and forget the idea of forming a new state."

The statehood effort gained momentum. But then came Pearl Harbor. The State of Jefferson Committee issued a statement that read:

"Because of the national emergency this is not a time for divisiveness. The State of Jefferson Committee no longer exists."

Mottaz's study is filled with boxes, file cabinets and notebooks jammed with California division material he has collected over the years. He is now in the process of writing a book on the subject.

Nearest Split in 1850

Mottaz said the closest California ever came to actually splitting into two states occurred in 1859. That year the Legislature approved a bill to form a new state called Colorado out of San Luis Obispo and Kern counties, parts of Tulare and Inyo counties and all the other counties to the south, including Los Angeles County. San Luis Obispo was to be the capital of the new state. (The Colorado of today was admitted as a state in 1876.)

The governor signed the bill and the division also was approved by the voters. But the U.S. Constitution called for congressional approval as well.

"There was a great deal of



BEN OLENDER / Los Angeles Times

History teacher Stan Mottaz with several California division maps displayed on his Eureka patio.

pro-slavery sympathy in Southern California. Congress, not wanting another slave state, did not act on the matter," Mottaz said.

In 1971 the late state Sen. Randolph Collier (D-Yreka) proposed there be two states: West California, made up of all the coastal

counties from Marin County to the Mexican border including the cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego, and East California, which would be everything else.

Six years later Collier also proposed splitting California into three states. In 1973, geography profes-

sor G. Etzel Peary of Cal State Los Angeles proposed that all state lines be redrawn to form 38 states in place of 50. Peary advocated that under the plan California be split into three states: Cascade in the north, El Dorado in the center and San Gabriel in the south.