The State of Jefferson Historical Group

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THE STATE OF JEFFERSON HISTORICAL GROUP (SOJHG) is a non-political group composed of archaeologists, historians, museum professionals, librarians, Native Americans, and interested community members from southern Oregon and northern California. The group has met annually for forty-one years, generally switching between an Oregon town and a California town. During the two-day sessions, members share their research into the history, culture, archaeology, and ecology of their common territory. We do not evaluate or make arguments regarding the validity of the concept of a separate political entity, but rather, view the State of Jefferson as a distinct geographic region where one can study the relationships among people, their cultures, and the environment — past and present.

This annual symposium began in 1976, when a group of U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management archaeologists from northern California and southern Oregon, led by Toby Hastie of the Winema National Forest, met in Klamath Falls, Oregon, to talk about their various projects and to share ideas. There were about fifteen people in attendance, and the group has grown and continued to meet every year since then, with the exception of 1979. Our thirty-ninth meeting, hosted by the Southern Oregon University (SOU) Laboratory of Anthropology, was held in Jacksonville, Oregon, in 2015, and our fortieth meeting, hosted by Humboldt State University (HSU) Cultural Resources Facility, was held in Arcata, California, the following year. Daily attendance at those meetings was between fifty and sixty people. The 2017 meeting was held in late February at the Redding Rancheria Tribal Offices at Win River Casino in Redding, California, and more than one hundred people attended. Our hosts were the Rancheria, California State University Chico (CSUC), and the Northeast Center of the California Historical Resources Information System.
It is fairly obvious that northern California is more like southern Oregon than southern California in terms of topography, geology, botany, obsidian sources, and other natural and cultural factors; and the Native peoples certainly did not draw a border at the current state line. Yet many archaeologists tend to be tied into their state organizations. The Oregon Archaeological Society was founded in 1951, and the Society for California Archaeology was founded in 1966. The multi-state Northwest Anthropological Conference has been held every year since 1948, but California anthropologists are not included. The SOJHG therefore offers a unique opportunity to share research and knowledge from this cross-state region.

This is an informal group where all are welcome, although we prefer that the papers presented are related to studies in any of the counties in California and Oregon that have been considered over the years to be part of the State of Jefferson. There are no by-laws, officers, membership dues, or meeting registration fees. During the meeting each year, the organizer
literally passes a hat to collect donations to cover the costs of coffee, snacks, meeting room rental, and any other expenses. This group is an excellent audience for students to present their first professional paper in a somewhat relaxed atmosphere, and we generally hear several papers by students studying archaeology and history at SOU, HSU, and CSUC.

I attended my first meeting in 1983 and presented a paper titled “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad: The LaMoine Lumber and Trading Company Railroad Logging System in Shasta County.” Since the late 1980s, I have maintained a mailing list to send out meeting announcements and other pertinent information that someone from the group wants to share across the state line. This network has frequently been used to put archaeologists and historians in touch with each other about their common interests.
At each meeting, twenty-four to twenty-eight papers have been presented over the two days on a variety of topics. Following are the titles of some of the papers from the last two meetings and the 2017 meeting. These examples are typical of the variety we see each year:

- Evidence for Paleoindian and Paleoarchaic Archaeology in Northernmost California
- Rising from the Ashes: The Archaeology of the Jacksonville Chinese District
- Social Drug Consumption in the New River Mining District, Trinity County
- Cultural Study of the Grape Growers and Wine Makers of Southern Oregon
- The Mysteries of the Atkins Meadow Bedrock Mortars, Siskiyou County
- The Archaeology of Camp Castaway, 1852: An Oregon Coast Shipwreck Site
- A Mother’s 1934 Letter to her CCC son in Hayfork, California
- A Curious Rock Slick in the Ishi Wilderness: Children at Play in the Archaeological Record
- California Indian Burning: An Explanation of Native American Under-Burning in the State of Jefferson Region
- Melting Movable Type in Musket Balls: X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) Analysis of Lead Artifacts from Miner’s Fort and Other Rogue River War Archaeological Sites
- Borax Lake and Western Stem Tradition along South Fork Mountain and Trinity River

One of the major projects conducted for many years within the cultural and geographic State of Jefferson is the Upper Klamath River Project led by Joanne Mack, Ph.D., of the University of Notre Dame and formerly of Pomona College. Her area of study is the portion of the Klamath River and its drainage that cuts through the Cascade Range, roughly from Keno, Oregon, downstream to the confluence of the Shasta River and Klamath River near Yreka, California, and along the Shasta River through Shasta Valley. Continuing the research from Mack’s doctoral dissertation, the project
seeks to investigate the evidence of human occupation and use within the drainage system and the system’s environmental attributes. Of particular interest are the cultural adaptations, interactions, and cultural changes reflected in archaeological remains dating roughly over the past 10,000 years. Since 1992, Mack has conducted archaeological surveys and excavations along the river corridor, working with archaeologists and other researchers in Oregon and California; taught an annual field class for many years; and followed up with obsidian sourcing and hydration studies, lithic analysis, and her specialized ceramic research into Siskiyou utility ware, which she first discovered. Almost every year at our annual meeting, she presents a paper on her latest results, new hypotheses, and questions for further research.

A valuable resource that developed from our State of Jefferson Historical Group is the Jim Rock Historic Can Collection housed in Digital Collections at the SOU Hannon Library. James T. Rock, Forest Archaeologist for Klamath National Forest for many years and an attendee at the first State of Jefferson meeting in 1976, was known for his expertise in identifying historic cans. He published several books and articles on the subject, discussing typologies and dating techniques based on the examination of factors such
as seams, closures, openings, and materials composition. He often packed his collection into suitcases and traveled with them throughout the State of Jefferson, as well as other parts of the country, to educate both professionals and the general public about cans, their historical context, and their use in interpreting historic archaeological sites. Following Jim’s death in 2010, his widow Mary Ellen donated the collection to SOU along with his notes. The cans and notes have all been digitized, creating a permanent tool for researchers well beyond our state.

Many research topics come to mind as I browse through past meeting agendas, listing studies that have been enhanced by the sharing of information between Oregon and California researchers. An interesting accompaniment to the Upper Klamath River Project has been the work conducted in that area by ethnobotanists Donn Todt and Susan Gleason. Their studies reveal the use of native plants by indigenous people and by ranchers, as well as home gardens and orchards where now-extinct rose and apple varieties were grown. Another frequent subject has been the numerous trails that have crossed the state line. A hypothesis by linguist Kenneth Whitsler in 1977 suggests that the ancestral Wintu people migrated to the Sacramento Valley area from southwestern Oregon, possibly via the Sacramento River canyon. Later, non-Native explorers such as John Work and Jedediah Smith came through the area and were followed by emigrant parties on various trails such as the Applegate Trail and the Yreka Trail.

These subjects are only a small sample of the papers presented, many of which are specific to a particular subject and location in either Oregon or California. Even though we have different state laws and use different forms and procedures when conducting our work, we all benefit from learning about other field methods and analytical techniques. This group also provides a network to learn about job prospects and volunteer opportunities.

In today’s political climate, our group has had to spend more time explaining that we are not associated with the resurgence of talk about a secession movement to form a new state. We want to maintain our historic name and keep that history alive. If you, the reader, are interested in learning more about the history of our State of Jefferson, from its earliest occupation to today, our annual meeting is open to the public. You can learn more by logging on to www.facebook.com/StateofJeffersonMeeting.