At the beginning of the 1925 school year, John W. Tremain asked officials at Bellingham’s Franklin School if his nine-year-old son, Russell, could be excused from participation in flag exercises. The officials told Tremain that all public school students were required by state law to salute the flag. The following Monday, September 14, 1925, John Tremain and his wife Ethel did not allow Russell to go to school. The Tremain’s decision not to allow Russell to attend school led to the arrest of John Tremain, who admitted that he was guilty of “failing without cause to keep his child of school age in school.” John and Ethel Tremain were members of the Elijah Voice Society, a millenialist religious organization that emerged from Charles Taze Russell’s Bible Student movement. John Tremain told Judge W. P. Brown that the flag salute and the oath of allegiance were incompatible with his religious beliefs, because the flag “is emblematic of war, and to salute the flag an indication of willingness to go to war.” He further explained his religious beliefs to Judge Brown, stating that “the law of God is higher than the law of man; it has been decreed, and it is the understanding, that the nations of the world are going down, are disintegrating, for a newer, higher order, while the people are fighting to maintain an old system which is against the ideals and principles of God.” Tremain added, “I firmly believe there will be a revolution, anarchical, within the next few years. God will reestablish the world and teach righteousness.” Judge Brown fined John Tremain $25 for the crime of failing to keep Russell in school. Because the Tremains continued to refuse to send their son back to school, Judge Brown removed Russell from the custody of his parents. The boy spent more than two years living away from his parents’ home, first at the county detention home, then with relatives, and later at a children’s home in Seattle.

Only a few scholars have suggested that the Tremain case was historically significant. David Manwaring devoted approximately five pages of his 1962 monograph, _Render unto Caesar: The Flag Salute Controversy_, to a description of the case. Most recently, Jennifer Jacobs Henderson, a communications scholar, published an article that explains why the Tremain case did not make it to the U.S. Supreme Court. Much remains to be said about what the statements of John Tremain, Judge Brown, members of the Elijah Voice Society, and newspaper reporters and editors reveal about religion, citizenship, and the power of the state in the 1920s.

I am applying for a summer research grant so that I can complete the research for and write an article about the Tremain case. My approach to this case differs significantly from that of previous scholars. Manwaring and Henderson examined the relationship between the Tremain case and later cases in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a person could not be forced to salute the flag if such a salute conflicted with that person’s religious beliefs. I seek to answer the following questions:

- Why did the Washington legislature pass a law requiring students to pledge allegiance to the flag?
- How did the passage of this law reflect the social, cultural, and political climate of the 1920s?

1 “Father who Refuses to Allow Son to Salute Flag Fined $25,” _Bellingham Herald_, September 16, 1925, 1, 8.
• Was the legislature influenced by patriotic organizations such as the American Legion?
• Was the legislature influenced by the Ku Klux Klan, which was active in the Northwest in the 1920s?
• What did the members of the Elijah Voice Society believe?
• How did these beliefs reflect the social, cultural, and political climate of the 1920s?
• Why did Judge Brown respond as he did to the words and actions of John Tremain?
• Were the judge’s words and actions influenced by concerns about political radicalism?
• Were the judge’s words and actions influenced by concerns about religious nonconformity?
• How did Judge Brown’s decisions affect the Tremain family?
• What does the Tremain case suggest about religious tolerance in the United States in the 1920s?
• What does the Tremain case suggest about definitions of citizenship in the United States in the 1920s?
• What does the Tremain case reveal about the relationship between the Pacific Northwest and other parts of the United States in the 1920s?

This project represents a significant departure from my previous research, almost all of which has examined race relations and the experiences of African Americans in California. However, struggles over the meaning of citizenship have been at the center of all of my research. Moreover, this project builds upon my previous knowledge of patriotic groups such as the American Legion. Many Legionnaires during World War II argued forcefully that Japanese Americans could not truly be U.S. citizens.

This project also builds upon and will contribute to my teaching. I have taught HIST 391 – History of the Pacific Northwest every year since I joined the WWU faculty in 1997. Since 2010 I have assigned students Henderson’s article about the Tremain case. My research and writing of an article about the Tremain case will deepen my knowledge of the social, cultural, and political history of the Northwest in the 1920s. I will incorporate this knowledge into my lectures, presentations, and class discussions.

I am well prepared to complete the research for and writing of this article in one summer. I began the research for this article in the summer of 2010, when I began reading through the Bellingham Herald. The articles in the Herald allowed me to see not only how the newspaper’s reporters, editor, and publisher described the case, but also the other kinds of articles that were published in the newspaper as the Tremain case unfolded. During the summer of 2014, I will need to travel several times to Seattle to examine the documents in the American Civil Liberties Union papers in the Department of Special Collections at the University of Washington Libraries and to examine newspaper articles from the Seattle newspapers about the passage of the flag salute law. I will also need to travel to Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, to examine the papers of Sydney Dix Strong, a Seattle minister and activist who was involved in the Tremain case.

My research so far suggests that the Tremain case reflected social, cultural, and political developments that were regional and national in scope. Because these events in Bellingham were not simply of local significance, I plan to submit my article to a journal whose scope is national, such as American Quarterly, the Journal of Social History, or the Journal of American History.