

Letter from Henry Gay to John Brinkley

October 20, 1925

KHS GayH-to-BrinkleyJ-1925-Oct20

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For ENGL 618 – Research Methods in English

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography was prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English degree program at Western Carolina University (WCU). The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship.
 - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
 - i. Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
 - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
 - i. Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
 - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
 - i. Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
 - a. Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted by the graduate students. While they take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are possible. As they learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires meticulous research and corroboration by authoritative sources. Our objective is to provide transcriptions and annotations of WCU's Special Collections materials that will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, patrons, and all users of our library's resources. If you wish to submit an emendation or correction for this document, please email Dr. Brian Gastle (bgastle@wcu.edu).

INTRODUCTION

This document is a letter from Henry Gay (Possibly Enrico “Henry” Gay) to John Brinkley, a famed “quack” doctor from the United States.

John Brinkley II practiced medicine throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Most well-known known for implanting goat testicles in men to cure impotence, he often performed these surgeries while intoxicated and under unsanitary conditions. He also built a radio station in Mexico that boasted the most powerful transmitter of the time. One of the most concerning parts of his radio shows was the “Medical Question Box,” segment where he offered medical advice to listeners and recommended “cures” that were only available from pharmacies affiliated with Brinkley (Lee, Alton).

Brinkley met his downfall after suing for libel a journalist who regularly called him a “quack” and “charlatan.” Brinkley lost this lawsuit, meaning that he could legally be called a quack doctor. He faced numerous malpractice lawsuits soon after, which claimed over three million dollars in damages. He declared bankruptcy in 1941 and died in 1942 of heart failure (Lee, Alton).

Henry Gay, the author of this letter, is an allusive figure. He is not mentioned in any of the biographies of Brinkley. The letterhead suggests that he lived or worked at “Torino (6) Via Madama Cristina, 4,” aka “Turin.” Today, this address refers to the Madama Cristina Market, an open air market which has been in its current location since 1876, suggesting Gay likely worked at or within the market.

The letterhead (see Appendix) is written in Italian. “RAPPRESENTANZE – VENDITE STOFFE – ESPORTAZIONE” is “Representative – Fabric Sales – Exporting,” suggesting that Gay sold and exported fabric. This could mean that he was a vendor at the Mercato Madama Cristina, though a list of market vendors from 1925 could not be found.

Brinkley was in Italy around this time, as the University of Pavia awarded him a medical degree in July 1925, and he returned in November to take the necessary exams and receive his Italian license to practice. This license was later revoked by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini after the American Medical Association appealed to him.

There are two records from the Waldensian Evangelical Church in Torino, Italy that could lead to the Henry Gay that wrote this letter.

The first is a record of a baptism for a François Henry Gay on November 8, 1852. This record lists Jean Pierre Gay as his father and Henriette Coucourde as his mother (cite). There is varying information on whether the Waldenes religion practiced baptism at birth, but François could be a baptism name that he later dropped (Reformed Reader).

The second document we have from the Waldensian Evangelical Church is a record of marriage between Henry Gay and Marie Rivoire on July 3, 1886. Assuming that he was baptized at birth, this would make Gay 34 years old at the time of his marriage. His father is once again listed as Jean Gay, but his mother is listed as Marie Constantin. It’s unclear whether this discrepancy means that the two documents are unrelated but given the timeframe and the inclusion of the same father’s name, it is plausible that they could be connected. Consistent information on Gay’s relatives listed in these documents was unavailable.

This document could be helpful for any scholar that is interested in United States and Italian relations in the 1920s, the history of fabric sales, and international trade.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

This transcription is a diplomatic edition, meaning that it has been transcribed as closely to the original text as possible (“Diplomatic Edition”).

In this transcription, the layout and length of sentences and the spacing of headers and signatures reflect the structure of the primary document. Any spelling or grammatical irregularities have been preserved. Manuscript page numbers have been noted at the top of each transcription page with square brackets.

This document is written on white paper that appears to be folded in many ways or crumpled throughout the years. The paper also has a few tears on the side, which cuts a few words off on the right-hand side. The complete words that are cut off by the tear are inferred through the text. The text is written in ink on 9x11.25-inch paper. The handwriting is legible, though there is notable place in the second paragraph where Gay makes a correction. This word could be “Stufts,” but since it appears that Gay wrote over a portion of this word, it could also read “stuffs.” Either word could change the meaning and intention of the letter. Please see the annotation for more information.

The header is in Italian and the translation and can be reference in the introduction to the document. Please see the appendix for an image of the letterhead.

TRANSCRIPTION

[MS page 1]

ENRICO GAY

RAPPRESENTANZE – VENDITE STOFFE – ESPORTAZIONE¹

TORINO (6)²

Via Madama Cristina, 4³

Telefono N.⁴

Torino, li⁵: October 20 1925

Dear Mr. Brinkley⁶

In reply to your second letter, very glad to hear from you, I do not know how to thank you enough for your kindness toward myself, when you were in Italy.⁷ I hope to be able to some day to see you again, and be in your company and of your good lady. Thank you very much for sending the music, which I hope will arrive safe, although you know it needs some thing else with the music instrument – which I have not got.⁸

¹ This text is in Italian and translates to “Representatives – Fabric Sales – Exporting” in English. I would like to thank the Nagy family, several of whom helped Italian translations in this letter.

² Turin, Italy.

³ This address leads to an open air market named Madama Cristina Market, which has been in this location since 1876 (“Madama Cristina Market”).

⁴ “telephone number”

⁵ Li by itself translates to “there” in English, but these words together translate to “Turin” in English.

⁶ It is interesting that Gay refers to John Brinkley as “Mr. Brinkley” here. Brinkley almost always refers to himself as Dr. Brinkley in his letters, even before earning a degree. We can speculate that Gay may refer to him as Mr. because he was aware that Brinkley was pursuing his medical degree at the University of Pavia and didn’t receive a license to practice until November of 1925 (Lee, Alton).

⁷ Brinkley and his family were traveling through Europe throughout 1925 and the University of Pavia in Torino Italy awarded him a medical degree in July 1925. He then returned to Italy in November of 1925 to take his exams in order to earn an Italian license to practice medicine (Lee, Alton).

⁸ It is unclear what type of music Brinkley sent to Gay, but Brinkley ran multiple radio stations throughout his life that played music. The first was KRKB out of Kansas, which was first broadcasted in September of 1923. KFKB played only live performances, including music. He primarily played country and orchestra music through this

I have commenced in business representing Stufts for suits, coats etc., so if you should or could recommend me to any large firms I should be so obliged to you, and could export goods, so kindly let me know, you perhaps could speak for me.⁹

Best wishes from Mrs. Gay and myself.

I remain,

Yours faithfully

Henry Gay

station, meaning that Brinkley had access to this music and likely could have found its way into Gay's hands (Lee, Alton).

⁹ Stufts: possibly "stuffs." From the letter head of this document, we know that Gay dealt in the sale, representation, and export of fabric. It is curious that Gay would need someone to export fabric goods when he himself claims to deal with exports. It could be that he was working to export these goods internationally, which he may not have experience with. However, since it appears that Gay made a correction here, this word could also be "stuff." This could mean that he has assisted with exports in the past but was now looking to export his own goods and is looking for large firms that might purchase these products.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

“François Henry Gay, Waldensian Evangelical Church Records, 1636-1941.”

AncestryHeritageQuest, 8 November 1852,

<https://www.ancestryheritagequest.com/search/collections/9998/records/1414>.

Baptism record for who could be the author of this letter.

“Henry Gay in the Italy, Waldensian Evangelical Church Records, 1636-1941.”

AncestryHeritageQuest, 3 July 1886,

<https://www.ancestryheritagequest.com/search/collections/9998/records/25708>

Marriage record for who could be the author of this letter. “Baptismal name.” *Merriam-Webster*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/baptismal%20name>. Accessed 10 December 2025.

This definition assists with explaining the details of a baptism name and how it might apply to the baptism record referenced.

Lee, R. Alton. *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley*, University Press of Kentucky, 2002. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2nwq9hd.12>. Accessed 23 Nov. 2025.

This biography provided a wealth of information about the life of John Brinkley.

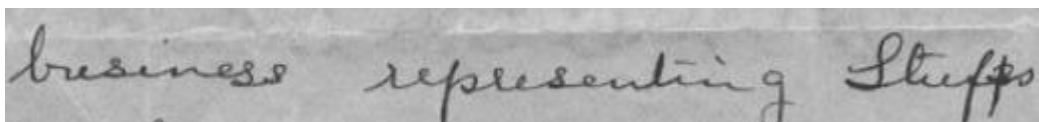
Waller, John. “Were the Waldenses Baptists or Pedeo-Baptists?” *The Western Baptist Review*, vol. 4, no. 5, <https://www.reformedreader.org/history/borpb.htm>

This resource was utilize to learn more about the Waldense religion and confirm that there is conflicting information on baptism timelines.

APPENDIX A



Letterhead for 20 December 1925 letter from Henry Gay to John Brinkley II



Location in letter where either the word "Stuffs" or "stuffs" is written.