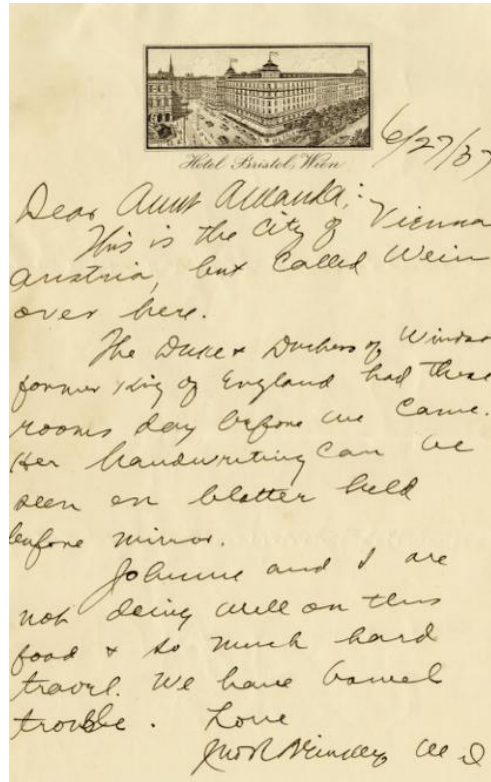


John R. Brinkley to Amanda Jackson

June 27, 1937

HL_SM_24-01 BrinkleyM-to-JacksonA-Jun27-1937



Letter card sent by John R. Brinkley from Vienna, Austria, from Hotel Bristol from Dr. John R. Brinkley Collection.

Transcribed and edited by Tyler Taylor

For ENGL 618 – Research Methods in English

Instructor: Dr. Brian Gastle

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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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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 TO DOCUMENT

This letter card, written on June 27, 1937, comes from the correspondence of John R. Brinkley and was addressed to Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson (“Aunt Amanda”). The card was composed during Brinkley’s summer tour of Europe with his family and was mailed from the Hotel Bristol in Vienna, Austria, whose crest is printed on the paper. In the note, Brinkley explains that the Austrians call the city “Wein” and boasts that the Duke and Duchess of Windsor had just vacated the suite he was occupying. After this name-dropping, the tone shifts. Brinkley admits that he and his young son are not adjusting well to the unfamiliar food and “hard travel,” writing candidly that “We have bowel trouble.” He signs the card “Jno R Brinkley MD,” still styling himself as a doctor.

The letter card also hints at Brinkley’s social circle and resources. Born near Beta in Jackson County, North Carolina, Brinkley was raised by his stepmother after his mother’s death and began his working life as a telegraph operator and mail carrier. He married Sally Margaret Wike in 1907; their marriage produced several children but ended in divorce. Afterwards, he wed Minerva (“Minnie”) Jones and eventually fathered John Richard Brinkley III. Brinkley’s medical education was sketchy; he bought a diploma from the Eclectic Medical University of Kansas City and became known for transplanting goat glands into men. He built one of the country’s most powerful radio stations to promote his surgery and used his popularity to run three unsuccessful campaigns for Kansas governor. When regulators shut down his Kansas station, he moved his hospital and broadcast operations to Del Rio, Texas. By the mid-1930s, Brinkley had amassed a huge fortune from his mail-order prescriptions and procedures, allowing him to travel to Europe and stay at luxury hotels like the Bristol.

The note’s recipient, Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson (1858–1945), was a cherished member of Brinkley’s wife’s family. She lived in North Carolina and kept regular correspondence with Brinkley and his family. The card dates from a peaceful time before Austria lost its independence; German troops annexed the country in March 1938, less than nine months after Brinkley wrote this letter card. His mention of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, who were visiting Vienna that summer, highlights his fascination with high society and suggests he chose the Bristol specifically for its celebrity appeal. Readers interested in Brinkley’s self-fashioning will find this card revealing, as it combines celebrity name-dropping with candid complaints about travel and health during his European tour, more than a decade after he initially went to Europe to earn his honorary degree from Pavia University.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Physical description

The letter card measures 6.25 × 9.5 inches and is made of cream-colored paper with the Hotel Bristol’s letterhead printed (not stamped) at the top. The message is written in black ink. The front of the card is clean, while the back shows minor staining; there are three horizontal fold lines where the card was creased to fit into an envelope. The accompanying envelope, measuring 6.5 × 3.75 inches, is also cream-colored and shows wear along the edges. Its upper edge has been roughly torn open, removing part of the back flap—unusual for Brinkley, who typically tore envelopes along the side. The envelope is mottled with tan

and blue stains; the hotel's return information and black postal marks are printed, while a blue postage stamp is physically affixed.

Transcription and editorial decisions

This edition provides a diplomatic transcription of the letter card, maintaining Brinkley's original spelling, punctuation, and line breaks. Since the letter was written on a printed letter card, there are no torn passages, and Brinkley's handwriting is legible. Any insertions or clarifications by the editor are shown in square brackets. When Brinkley uses abbreviations (e.g., "Jno" for John), they are kept as in the original; line breaks are reproduced even if they create uneven lines. Stains or creases visible on the letter do not obscure any words, so no textual reconstructions were needed. The envelope has been described but not transcribed, as it contains no writing other than the address and postal markings. Modern names, dates, and places mentioned in the introduction and transcription are explained in the notes.

Unless otherwise noted, the biographical details about John R. Brinkley's childhood, marriages, children, medical training, goat-gland practice, radio ventures, political campaigns and relocations—and the genealogical information about Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson and her family—are drawn from William Powell's *NCpedia* entry, the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources highway marker write-up, early biographies by R. Alton Lee and Clement Wood, the *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, the *Handbook of Texas Online*, and Carolyn Bost Crabtree's *My Wike Family*

Transcription

Dear Aunt Amanda:¹
This is the city of Vienna,
Austria, but called Wein
over here.²

The Duke + Duchess of Windsor
former King of England had their
rooms day before we came.³
Her handwriting can be
seen on blotter
held before mirror.

Johnnie and I are

¹ Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson (1858–1945). Nicknamed “Aunt Mandy,” she was a member of Brinkley’s first wife’s Wike family. Genealogical records show that she married James Thomas Jackson and raised her sons, J. Lee and William Albert, near East Laporte in Jackson County, North Carolina. After Brinkley’s mother died, Amanda helped care for him. The letter-card in this edition was addressed to her decades later, reflecting a bond that survived Brinkley’s rise and fall. For Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson and the Wike/Jackson line, see Carolyn Bost Crabtree’s *My Wike Family: A Genealogy* and related census records, for Brinkley’s early family background, see William Powell’s NCPedia entry on John R. Brinkley and The North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources’ highway marker write-up.

² Brinkley spells Wien (Vienna’s German name) as “Wein,” which in German actually means “wine.” In June 1937 Austria was still an independent republic; the German annexation (Anschluss) occurred in March 1938. See *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* for more on Austrian political chronology.

³ The Vienna Hotel Bristol was a luxury hotel frequented by aristocrats and celebrities. Hotel histories and royal travel accounts note that Edward, Duke of Windsor, and Wallis Simpson stayed there discreetly in the mid-1930s, reportedly renting an entire floor. This supports Brinkley’s anecdote about occupying the suite the Windsors had recently vacated. See, for example, “The Trip to Austria.” *History of Royal Women* and published histories of the Hotel Bristol in Vienna for more information.

not doing well on this
food + so much hard
travel. We have bowel
trouble.⁴ Love
Jno R Brinkley MD ⁵

⁴ Health complaints. Brinkley’s candid mention of “bowel trouble” underscores the bodily realities of long distance travel and unfamiliar food, humanizing a figure more often depicted as an over the top radio celebrity and medical quack.

⁵ John Romulus / John Richard Brinkley (1885–1942). Born near Beta, North Carolina, Brinkley was raised by his stepmother, Sarah Telitha “Sally” Mingus (“Aunt Sally”), after the death of his mother, Sarah Candace Burnett. He married Sally Margaret Wike in 1907 and early biographers agree that they had daughters Wanda, Maxine, and Beryl and a son, John Emerson, before the marriage ended and Brinkley left North Carolina. After the marriage dissolved, he wed Minerva “Minnie” Jones in 1913 and later fathered John Richard Brinkley III. Brinkley studied at Bennett Medical College in Chicago and the Eclectic Medical University of Kansas City, schools often criticized for lax or “diploma mill” standards, then moved to Milford, Kansas, where he became famous for transplanting goat glands into male patients and promoting the procedure over high-power radio. See William Powell’s NCpedia entry on John R. Brinkley, The North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources’ highway marker write-up, Clement Wood’s *The Life of a Man: A Biography of John R. Brinkley*, R. Alton Lee’s *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley*, and the *Handbook of Texas Online* for more information on Brinkley’s life and career.

ANNOTATED WORKS CITED

Ancestry Library Edition. *Ancestry*. www.ancestrylibrary.com.

Genealogy portal (accessed via Hunter Library / ProQuest) that I used to search across census schedules, military files, and vital record indexes for “John Romulus Brinkley,” “Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson,” and related Wike/Jackson lines. It functions as my umbrella access point for more specific collections cited below.

Brinkley, John R. “Letter card from Vienna, Austria, to Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson, June 1937.” *Dr. John R. Brinkley Papers*. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC. Hotel Bristol stationery.

Links the family to the Hotel Bristol in Vienna, name drops the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and records that Brinkley and Johnnie have “bowel trouble,” which I use to humanize the larger than life “Goat Gland King.”

Crabtree, Carolyn Bost. *My Wike Family: A Genealogy*. 25 Jan. 2022. Self published family history.

Wike/Jackson genealogy used to pin down Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson’s dates, her marriage to James Thomas Jackson, and her sons J. Lee and William Albert. This lets me identify the “Aunt Amanda” in the postcard and letter card as part of the Wike line rather than Brinkley’s birth family.

“Hotel Bristol Wien.” *The Most Famous Hotels in the World*, <https://famoushotels.org/hotels/bristol-vienna>.

Brief institutional history of Vienna’s Hotel Bristol, emphasizing its aristocratic and celebrity clientele. This supports my note that Brinkley is clearly pleased to associate himself with that world when he writes about the Windsors’ rooms.

“John Romulus Brinkley.” *U.S., Find a Grave® Index, 1600s–Current*. Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012. Ancestry Library Edition, www.ancestrylibrary.com.

Index entry that lists Brinkley’s birth as Jul. 8 1885 in Beta, Jackson County, North Carolina, and his death on May 26 1942 in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. I use this as a quick, database backed confirmation of the basic life dates and place names that appear in my headnotes and are also repeated in NCPedia and the TSHA Handbook.

“John R. Brinkley.” *U.S., Confederate Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861–1865*. Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Ancestry Library Edition, www.ancestrylibrary.com.

Service record file for a *different* John R. Brinkley (born c. 1838), whose Confederate service helps contextualize the older generation of Brinkleys that the quack doctor later claims as his people. I consulted this to see how many “John R. Brinkleys” show up in Civil War records and

to understand how easily later biographers might have folded multiple men into a single family narrative.

Lee, R. Alton. *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley*. University Press of Kentucky, 2002.

Standard scholarly biography tracing Brinkley's medical schemes, radio empire, legal troubles, and eventual financial collapse. I use it to verify the Pavia "degree," the timeline of moves from Milford to Del Rio, and the broader context behind his "honest money" lecture to Johnnie.

McFarland, Keith D. "The Life and Controversies of John Brinkley: Medical Charlatan and Radio Pioneer." *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/brinkley-john-romulus>.

Texas focused reference that fills in his move to Del Rio, the goat gland practice, the Mexican "border blaster" station, and his gubernatorial campaigns. I lean on this for the career background sitting behind both the 1928 letter and the 1937 travel postcards.

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. "John R. Brinkley 1885–1942 (Q-52)." *NC DNCR Blog*, Jan. 23 2024, <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/blog/2024/01/23/john-r-brinkley-1885-1942-q-52>.

Official marker write up for the Jackson County highway sign; it condenses Brinkley's notoriety, radio work, and political runs into short public facing language. I use it to justify why WCU preserves his papers and to cross check the timeline underlying the document.

Powell, William S. "Brinkley, John Romulus." *NCpedia*, North Carolina Government & Heritage Library, 1979, <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/brinkley-john-romulus>.

Concise state level biography confirming his parents, early years in Jackson County, multiple marriages, and career arc. I treat this as a baseline factual check against the self serving story he tells his son in 1928.

Schneider, Albert J. "Brinkley, John Richard (1885–1942)." *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Central Arkansas Library System, 16 June 2023, encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/john-richard-brinkley-1105/.

Arkansas-focused reference entry that summarizes Brinkley's goat-gland practice, his move to Little Rock and Del Rio, and his legal and financial collapse. I use it to cross-check Lee and McFarland on the Little Rock hospital, Arkansas malpractice suits, and the late-career "Brinkley era" in the state.

"The Trip to Austria." *History of Royal Women: The Year of the Duchess of Windsor*, 2021,

<https://www.historyofroyalwomen.com/the-year-of-the-duchess-of-windsor-2021/the-year-of-the-duchess-of-windsor-wallis-and-the-kents-part-one/>.

Summarizes the Duke and Duchess of Windsor's mid 1930s trips, including their stay at the Bristol. I use it to show that Brinkley's "Duke + Duchess of Windsor" anecdote maps onto real royal travel, even if the blotter detail is likely embellished.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Austria." *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.

Brief reference entry outlining Austria's political situation before and after the March 1938 *Anschluss*. I use it to confirm that Austria was still an independent republic in June 1937 when Brinkley wrote from Vienna.

U.S. Census Bureau. "Population Schedules for Jackson County, North Carolina, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900." *U.S. Federal Census, 1900*. National Archives and Records Administration. *Ancestry*, www.ancestrylibrary.com.

I used the 1900 census pages for Jackson County via Ancestry to locate Wike and Jackson households in the East Laporte/Beta area and to check approximate ages and household composition for Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson and her family. These entries help me treat "Aunt Amanda" in the postcards as a real, historically traceable person rather than just a nickname in Brinkley's letters

Wood, Clement. *The Life of a Man: A Biography of John R. Brinkley*. Goshorn Publishing Company, 1937.

More sympathetic biography that preserves names, dates, and anecdotes Brinkley liked to circulate about himself. It helps me cross check the family narrative he gives his son in 1928, especially around his parents, early education, and self presentation.