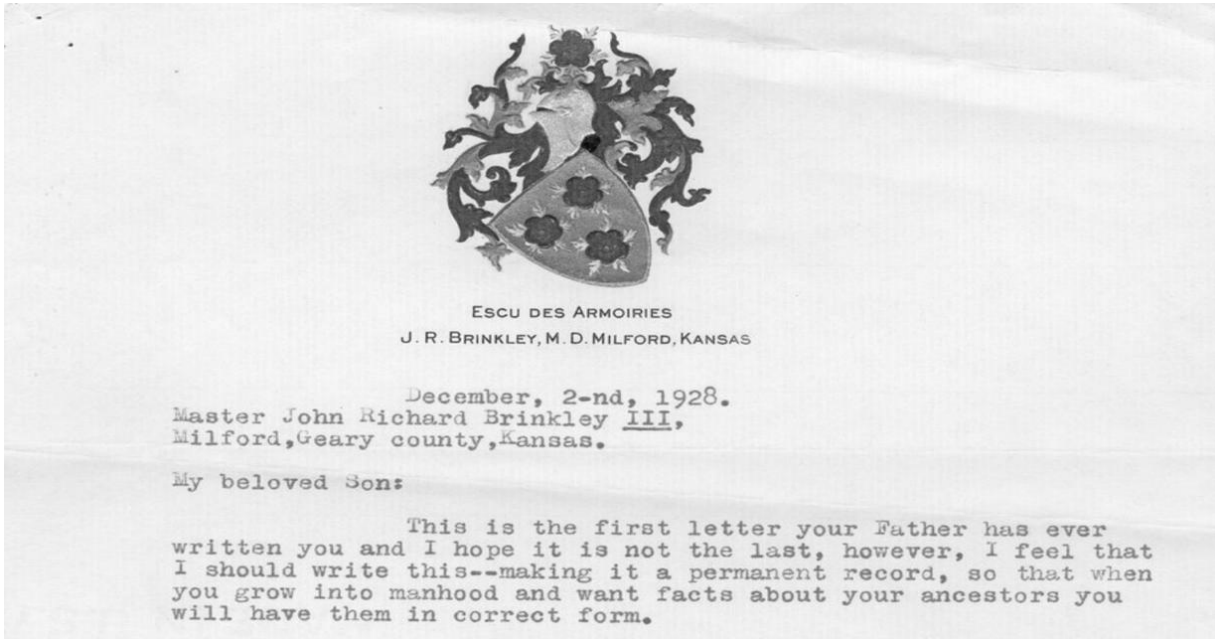


John R. Brinkley II to John R. Brinkley III

December 2, 1928

KHS BrinkleyJ-II-to-BrinkleyJ-II-1928-Dec2



*First page of John R. Brinkley's Dec. 2, 1928 letter to his son "Johnnie Boy," from the Dr. John R. Brinkley Papers
(Kansas State Historical Society Special Collections).*

Transcribed and edited by Tyler Taylor

For ENGL 618 – Research Methods in English

Instructor: Dr. Brian Gastle

December 10, 2025

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 manuscript is a single personal document from the Dr. John R. Brinkley Papers: a five-page letter dated December 2, 1928 and addressed to Brinkley's infant son, John Richard Brinkley III. When read carefully, the letter reveals how Brinkley—already a controversial and wealthy physician—wanted to shape his son's understanding of family and self. Composed on personalized stationery from his clinic in Milford, Kansas, the letter traces the family's lineage back to the mountains of western North Carolina, recounts the lives and deaths of parents and grandparents, and offers a moral lesson about perseverance and education. Brinkley directs his son to the locations of ancestral graves, describes his own childhood of poverty and toil along the Tuckaseegee River, and urges "Johnnie Boy" to study hard, join the Masons and Kiwanis, and one day become a doctor. Conspicuously absent are references to Brinkley's first marriage or his daughters from that union; the letter instead presents the son born to Brinkley's second wife as the sole heir of a heroic family narrative.

John Romulus—later John Richard—Brinkley (1885–1942) was born near Beta, North Carolina. After his mother, Sarah Candace Burnett, died when he was a child, he was reared by his stepmother, Sarah Mingus ("Aunt Sally"). As a young man he married Sally Margaret Wike in 1907; early biographical accounts list several children from this marriage, though Brinkley later left North Carolina and the marriage dissolved. In 1913 he married Minerva "Minnie" Jones and later fathered John Richard Brinkley III. Brinkley studied at unaccredited medical schools and acquired eclectic credentials before moving to Milford, Kansas, where he built a lucrative practice transplanting goat glands into men and touting his services over a powerful radio station. His medical claims made him famous and infamous in equal measure. By the late 1920s, when he wrote this letter, Brinkley had amassed considerable wealth and influence; he would later run unsuccessfully for governor of Kansas three times and eventually relocate his operations to Del Rio, Texas. The 1928 letter offers a self-fashioned origin story for the son who would inherit this legacy.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Physical description. The December 2, 1928 letter comprises five sheets of cream-colored stationery embossed with Brinkley's coat of arms and the legend "J. R. Brinkley, M.D., Milford, Kansas." Each sheet measures roughly 8.5 by 11 inches and shows creases from having been folded for mailing. The letter is typewritten in black ink using a manual typewriter; occasional strikeouts and hand-corrected details (such as amended dates and ages) appear in pencil. The text is single-spaced, and the pages are numbered by Brinkley at the top. There is no envelope preserved with the manuscript. The letter survives in the Dr. John R. Brinkley Papers at the Kansas State Historical Society and was consulted in high-resolution digital surrogate via the Kansas Memory platform.

This edition presents a diplomatic transcription of Brinkley's letter. The transcription preserves his original spelling, punctuation, capitalization, line breaks, and directly reproduces words such as "Northcarolina" and "Tuckaseegee" exactly as they appear, with no attempt to correct for legibility or modernization. Page markers are denoted by ([MS page 1], [MS page 2], etc.) corresponding to the surviving sheets. Editorial insertions and clarifications are enclosed in square brackets; handwritten corrections are rendered in roman type to distinguish them from the original typescript. Footnote markers in the transcription refer readers to notes that contextualize names, places, and events mentioned in the letter. Brinkley signs his letter "Jno. R. Brinkley MD," and that abbreviation has been retained here. The aim of the edition is to convey both the

material characteristics of the document and the particularities of Brinkley's self-presentation without smoothing over his idiosyncrasies.

Unless otherwise noted, the biographical and genealogical information summarized in this introduction draws on standard reference sources: William Powell's *NCpedia* entry on John R. Brinkley for details of his early life and upbringing; the early biographies by R. Alton Lee and Clement Wood for his marriages and children; entries in the *Handbook of Texas Online* for his medical training, goat-gland practice, radio enterprise, and political career; and genealogical compilations such as Carolyn Bost Crabtree's *My Wike Family: A Genealogy* for names and dates associated with the Wike family and Brinkley's marriages and verified by Ancestry Library databases.

TRANSCRIPTION

[MS page 1]

Escu Des Armoiries

J. R. Brinkley, M.D. Milford, Kansas

December, 2-nd, 1928.

Master John Richard Brinkley III,
Milford, Geary County, Kansas

My beloved son¹:

This is the first letter your father has ever written you and I hope it is not the last, however, I feel that I should write this--making it a permanent record, so that when you grow into manhood and want facts about your ancestors you will have them in correct form.

I wish that my Papa had written such a letter for me. I would prize it very highly.

I know very little about the father and mother of my own father. I think they came from Virginia and settled near Charlotte, N.C. in Mecklenberg county. I know my father was the youngest of several sons, if he had any sisters I never heard of them. He had a baby brother by the name of "Billy" that died in his youth and is buried in the cemetery at Charlotte, N.C. His father and

¹ John Richard Brinkley III (1927-1976)—commonly referred to as "Johnnie Boy" by his father, is the only child Brinkley had with Minnie Jones and the addressee of the 1928 history narrative transcribed in this edition. Reference works agree that Brinkley's only child from this second marriage was born in Milford, Kansas, on September 3rd, 1927. Multiple sources treat him as Minnie and Brinkley's sole surviving issue at then end of the quack doctor's career, reinforcing the way this letter erases the children from Brinkley's previous marriage and positions Johnnie as the exclusive heir to a heroic, upwardly mobile family story. Contemporary newspaper features and later biographical accounts describe Johnnie Boy being tutored separately from local children, appearing on his father's radio programs, and traveling with his parents on their yacht and to Del Rio, Texas. These details match the aspirational future Brinkley sketches here, in which his son will be well educated, financially provided for, and guided into medical and fraternal orders such as the Masons and Kiwanis. In this edition, the 1928 letter thus functions as a kind of charter document for Johnnie's place in the family, offering him graveyard directions, an origin story rooted in Jackson County, and a set of middle class virtues to live up to, even as other sources complicate that legacy by emphasizing the medical fraud, legal troubles, and public notoriety behind the reassuring and self-mythologizing paternal voice. See Albert J. Schneider's *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* on John Richard Brinkley and William Powell's *NCPedia* biography on Brinkley, Paula Allen's *San Antonio Express* column on the Brinkley family in Texas, the *Kansas State Historical Society's* John R. Brinkley papers and related illustrations in Clement wood's *The Life of a Man* for more depictions of Minnie and Johnnie Boy and their role in Brinkley's self-fashioned family image

mother may be buried there, I don't know. My father had brothers living not so far from Asheville, N.C. possibly some near Newton, or Hickory. One of his brothers was named "Dave" another "Sam". My father attended Davidson College at Davidson N.C. one of the old Southern aristocratic schools. How he became a doctor I do not know. I do know that he was an officer in the Confederate Army and was wounded twice. What battles he was in I do not know, he was a surgeon in the army and must have been in the thick of things to have been wounded. I know that he was a defender of Lincoln's Principles-- this made him a Republican-- and he was almost alone in politics--after the War. He did not believe in slavery and while he was opposed to slavery and believed the South wrong-- he was loyal to the Confederacy and fought for them-- but inwardly hoping the negroes would be freed.² All of this will not have the meaning to you that it has to me as the slavery question is being forgotten by the younger generation and should be. My father was married several times. If I remember correctly his father had his first marriage annulled because he was under age. Of his other wives-- I know little. One was named Fanny Knight-- another Marguerite Buchanan. I know Fanny died of Tuberculosis, what happened to Marguerite I do not know.

[MS page 2]

Page 2 to my Son JRB.III.

My father practiced in Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina. You will note these three states come together not so far from Southwestern Northcarolina boundry and he seemed to cover this territory. He was a sportsman in his day as the old tin type pictures I have of him in the album with his dog and gun will show. I was born near Beta, N.C on July 8, 1885.³ Should you ever seek the house I was born in, you would get off the train at

² Biographies of John R. Brinkley confirms that his father, John Richard Brinkley, served as a rural mountain doctor and medic for the confederacy and that his mother, Sarah Candace Burnett, died when he was five. The entry also notes his illegitimate birth and that he was later raised by Sarah Mingus ("Aunt Sally"), which helps contextualize Brinkley's idealized account of his father's politics and principles here. See R. Alton Lee's *The Bizarre Careers of John R.*, *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, and Powell's *NCpedia* biography of John R. Brinkley for more information.

³ Beta is a small unincorporated community in Jackson County, North Carolina, on the Tuckasegee River between Dillsboro and Sylva. Reference work consistently lists Brinkley's birthplace as "near Beta, Jackson County, North Carolina" or simply "Beta, North Carolina." See William Powell's *NCpedia* entry on John Romulus Brinkley and the *Find a Grave* index entry for "John Romulus Brinkley" accessed via Ancestry, both of which repeat the Beta birthplace, for more information.

Beta postoffice and go East over the creek towards the old Dan Bryson house.⁴ I think this is 3/4 or a mile East of the depot. You pass the Bryson house looking east on the right hand side of the road, up on the bank you will see a small frame building, I think with 3 chimneys and this is my birthplace. Travelling this road east you come to the forks of the road where is located a church called Wesley Chapel that my father built⁵ mostly out of his own pocket--it broke him--and as he died a few years later--I was left destitute. In this graveyard around Wesley chapel is buried my Aunt, my mother's sister Aunt Jane Jenkins.⁶

All of this land even where Sylva and Beta stand as well as the old town of Webster were once under cultivation by my mother's grandfather--Old man Mingus.⁷ More of him later.

Two or 3 miles east of Wesley chapel you come to Love's chapel⁸

⁴ "Dan Bryson" is one of several Brysons appearing in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Jackson County records. Census schedules accessed through Ancestry Library Edition shows Bryson household in the Beta / East Laporte area, and local land records summarized in county histories place Brysons among the better-known families there. I have not been able to identify a single house that can be matched unambiguously to Brinkley's "old Dan Bryson house," so I treat it as a recognizable local landmark rather than a precise locatable structure. See U.S. Census Bureau, *Population Schedules for Jackson County, North Carolina, 1900*, via Ancestry Library Edition.

⁵ Wesley Chapel was a small Methodist church serving rural communities east of Beta and East Laporte. Modern maps and church/cemetery surveys place a Wesley Chapel and associated graveyard along roughly the route Brinkley describes, and Crabtree's Wike/Burnett genealogy shows his mother's kin active in Methodist congregations on this stretch of Tuckasegee. I have not located independent documentary proof that his father personally financed most of the building, but the location and family ties make his claim plausible. See Carolyn Bost Crabtree's *My Wike Family: A Genealogy* and US Census Bureau, *Population Schedules for Jackson County, North Carolina, 1900* for more information.

⁶ Brinkley's "Aunt Jane Jenkins" is almost certainly his maternal aunt Jane (or Janie) Burnett Jenkins. Crabtree's genealogy and Jackson County census entries identify a Jane Burnett who married into the Jenkins family and lived in East Laporte / Beta area during Brinkley's childhood. Family tradition places her birth in or near the Wesley Chapel graveyard he is mapping out here, so I follow Crabtree's in treating "Aunt Jane Jenkins" as a Burnett aunt buried in Wesley Chapel. See Carolyn Bost Crabtree's *My Wike Family: A Genealogy* and US Census Bureau, *Population Schedules for Jackson County, North Carolina, 1900* for more information.

⁷ "Old Man Mingus" likely refers to one of Brinkley's Mingus forebears on his mother's side. Census and land records show Mingus households owning and farming land around Webster, Beta, and the future site of Sylva in the late nineteenth century. Brinkley's claim that "all of this land" was under Mingus cultivation is a rhetorical exaggeration, but it rests on the real prominence of the Mingus family as early landholders in the valley. See William Powell's article in *NCPedia* on John Romulus Brinkley, Keith D. McFarland's *Handbook of Texas Online* article "The Life and Controversies of John Brinkley," and U.S. Census Bureau, *Population Schedules for Jackson County, North Carolina, 1900* for more information regarding this.

⁸ Love's Chapel was another small Protestant church east of Wesley Chapel, part of the same network of rural congregations along the Tuckasegee. Genealogical and cemetery work on the Wike, Burnett, and Mingus families locates related burials near a Love's Chapel in this area, supporting Brinkley's memory of the chapel as a family

an old community church where my Uncle John got his inspiration and conviction to become a preacher. Standing at Love's chapel facing east, you will see woods and timber to your right hand, going thru this for 1/4 mile you will come the old home place of my mother.⁹

Back at the house where I was born at Beta, my mother died in this house at 2-pm April, 23-rd, 1891 and was buried some place in Love's Chapel graveyard,¹⁰ which is 1/4 mile east of the church on left hand side of road on the hill. Her grave is lost to me because I was only 5 years old when she died and by time I was old enough to appreciate such things, the board places as a marker is gone. A cedar tree marked the spot but that is gone. I have hoped to erect a monument some place near in her memory. Her father and mother are buried in this graveyard Thomas Burnett and I believe Mary Burnett¹¹ are the grave stone names.

Let me say that I had no brothers or sisters. Possibly Nell Brinkley is my half sister--being the daughter of Marguerite Buchanan, but I am not sure--she is the celebrated cartoonist.¹²
(Nell)

My mother was 31 years old when she died and my father was 63. when she died, 68 when he died. He died way back in the mountains

worship site and a place where his "Uncle John" felt called to preach. See Carolyn Bost Crabtree's *My Wike Family: A Genealogy* for more information.

⁹ [Handwritten] Mingus they homesteaded land to Webster.

¹⁰ Modern cemetery surveys and family genealogies confirm a cluster of Burnett and related graves near Love's Chapel, including Thomas Burnett whose dates match Brinkley's maternal grandfather. No marker for his mother survives in those surveys, which fits his memory of a wooden marker and cedar tree that had disappeared by the time he was old enough to return. See Carolyn Bost Crabtree's *My Wike Family: A Genealogy*, and John Romulus Brinkley, "U.S. *Find a Grave Index, 1600-Current*, via Ancestry Library Edition for more information.

¹¹ Brinkley names his maternal grandparents as Thomas and Mary Burnett. Crabtree's genealogy and the 1900 Jackson County census list a Thomas Burnett married to a Mary (or often Mary Ann) living in this part of the country in the mid to late nineteenth century. Modern cemetery transcriptions clearly record Thomas Burnett, but Mary is less certain, which suggests Brinkley was correct in his memory of the lost or illegible marker. See Carolyn Bost Crabtree's *My Wike Family: A Genealogy*, U.S. Census Bureau, *Population Schedules for Jackson County, North Carolina, 1900* for more information.

¹² Nell Brinkley (1886-1944) was a nationally syndicated illustrator whose "Brinkley Girl" cartoons appear in major U.S. newspapers in the early twentieth century. Modern biographical sketches and genealogical work on John R. Brinkley's family do not suggest or support a close kinship between the two Brinkleys. Using Ancestry Library Edition and related records, I treat his suggestion that she might be a half-sister as speculative, and had difficulty proving and of that, so it is to be treated as unproven rather than an established family fact/ See Ancestry Library edition for more information.

beyond the head of the Tuckasegee river beyond Cashier's valley¹³ on the evening of April 14, 1896, where he had gone to see a sick woman. He had been sick and was not able to go but being a faithful old country doctor made the long ride of 26 miles from our home¹⁴ at 1 mile East of Eastlaporte postoffice on horseback arriving at her home, he prescribed for her, declined supper and died sitting in a chair while the family was eating. He was brought back to the Wike graveyard just across the river from our then home and buried. I buried my Aunt Sallie alongside of him, she died Dec 26, 1906 and a monument marks their graves.¹⁵

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Page 3. To JRB.III.

As stated I was born in the house near Beta and my mother died in it. My father had no relatives of his own excepting some brothers scattered over the state that meant nothing to him. I was his pride and joy and my mother had an Aunt Sally of Sarah Mingus, sister of her own mother that was present when I was born, and this Aunt cared for me and my mother until my mother's death and stayed on and raised me. My father married her and she raised me and was to me the only mother I really ever knew. My mother was a very well educated woman, said to be a pretty woman, with golden hair. She was anxious for me to be a great and good man just as I am anxious for you to be a great man. She had only one regret in dieing and that was leaving me. Aunt Sally lived until I was 21 or almost 21 years and then died. She was a darling good woman.

¹³ The Tuckasegee River rises in the mountains near Cashiers and runs north through Jackson County toward Dillsboro and Sylva. A ride from East Laport area to farms in the Cashiers headwaters region would have been a long, mountainous trip of roughly the distance Brinkley gives. His description of his father dying "behind the head of the Tuckasegee river beyond Cashier's valley" underlines both the remoteness of the call and his father's identity as a rural doctor. See North Carolina's Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, "John R. Brinkley 1885-1942 (Q-52)" for more information.

¹⁴ Redacted via Brinkley covering incorrect info with x's, originally read "then present".

¹⁵ Sarah Mingus ("Aunt Sally") was Brinkley's stepmother and became his primary caregiver after his mother's death, and genealogical work on the Wike and Jackson families place the Wike graveyard near the East Laporte home he describes. Amanda Avaline Wike Jackson ("Aunt Mandy") helped raise him. Crabtree's genealogy notes provide dates and family links for the Wike/Jackson line and "Aunt Mandy", helping to explain why Brinkley later writes from Europe to both women's branches of the family. See R. Alton Lee's *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley* and Carolyn Bost Crabtree's *My Wike Family: A Genealogy* for more information.

Now up to the present time I have been discussing my mother and father and my father's people.

The grandfather and grandmother of my mother were named Mingus and were pioneer settlers in Western North Carolina and owned many counties and thousands of acres of land. They had several boys and girls. I only know of my Aunt who raised me Sarah Telitha Mingus and her sister who was my grandmother Mary or Margaret Mingus. Aunt Sally married my father. My grandmother married Thomas Burnett, from where he came, I know not. He had boys and girls. The exact number I am not sure. One boy my only living relative at this writing (excepting his own children) is John Sevier Burnett, he is in charge of the Field work for the University of Chattanooga, Chattanooga, Tenn. He has one boy and 3 girls. (excepting his own children) means the boy and 3 girls of my uncle. Besides my Uncle there was another baby brother "Billy". My Uncle told me that Billy starved to death during the Civil War, he was a baby at breast and his mother, (My mother's mother) did not have enough to eat to give enough milk to feed him and he starved. Then I had Aunt Jane that is buried at Wesley Chapel within 2 miles of Sylva and Beta that I have never mentioned before. Aunt Jane is married to Thomas Jenkins, a near-do-well. They had some boys and girls, what became of them I do not know. I played with them as a child but lost track of them. Think most of them went to cotton mills in South Carolina.

In the old family album you will find pictures of my Uncle, my Aunt Sally, my father and in a group of 3 tin type you will find my mother and she is pregnant with me and you can see her hiding her enlarged abdomen. It's a poor likeness, almost faded out but is all I have. I have none of my grandmother and grandfather but think my Uncle John has as he took some pictures before their deaths.

You will see that my ancestors were all of old sturdy pioneer stock. No doubt very old fashioned. It seems there was a streak of intelligence out of both families. You will note my father went to college and became a doctor. My mother's brother educated himself and became a noted preacher and religious worker.

After my mother's death in 1891 we moved up the Tuckaseige river 12 miles to Eastlaporte and the only way to tell you to find the

Page 4 to JRB III

house where I spent my boyhood until I was 16 is to go to Eastlaporte postoffice and enquire for the Wike graveyard. When you have located the right one you will find the small monument to my father and Aunt Sally's grave.¹⁶ Looking directly across the river and close to the river's edge is a frame house in a small piece of bottom land and this is where your Daddy played, studied and walked to school up the river 3 miles to the Forks of the Tuckasegee river where on the hill [redacted, s]top surrounded by graves is a frame school house and this is where most of my education was acquired. Down below the old house at Cullowhee is the State Normal where I was a welcome student but due to lack of funds I could not attend as I should.

Strange to say, most of my class mates and boy hood chums left those mountains and went to various parts of the country and in so far as I can hear are doing well. A recitation of who they were would not interest you.

On the old hill sides on both sides of the river at the old Eastlaporte home I have played, hunted O'possums, Fox, coons and squirrels. Below the house on right hand side of the road, river on left hand side, up on the hill side, among the trees is a spring from which I carried water to our house as we would not use the river water for cooking and drinking purposes as most peoples out houses and barns drained into it.

Below the house and below the old barn is a deep hole in the river where I have spent many happy hours swimming. Also above the house, where the river turns and where the rock projects into the river on opposite side is a good or was a good fishing hole where many happy hours were spent.

You will see that my father was 58 years old when I was born and my mother was 3¹⁷ You will note that my mother died leaving me at the

¹⁶ Brinkley directs his son to the Wike cemetery, where later erected a monument in East Laporte to Aunt Sally near his cottage, underscoring the importance of this landscape in his self-presentation. See *Smoky Mountain Living* article "Homes Alone: The Stories of Four Historic Mountain Structures" for more information.

¹⁷ Handwritten correction of 26.

tender age of 5 and my father die¹⁸ leaving me at the age of 10 without brothers or sisters, no one to help me except Aunt Sally who was old and had no income except what she received as a mid-wife among the mountain folks at \$3.00 per delivery. She was high priced as the other mid-wives delivered for \$1.50. So I guess it runs in our family to specialize. The little farm land around the old home did not produce much for sale but with her few dollars income we managed to live. I picked up pine knots from the river and made fires at night in the old fire place by which I could study as we could not afford coal oil lamps as oil was worth 20 cents a gallon and that was a fortune in those days. It would buy me a shirt or Aunt Sally a waist or Bonnet, elderly women did not wear hats in the backwoods--wore black satin bonnets and most of them smoked a clay pipe. Aunt sally lost hers one day and quit.

As a little boy I can remember watching my father make his own medicines from mountain herbs and compounding his prescriptions from medicines purchased, taking a keen interest and making a solemn resolution to be a doctor like Daddy. I had no chance of being one as I had no visible source of income in those mountains. I was eligible for a first grade teachers certificate which would permit me to teach school to the mountain kids for 3 months in the year and board with the scholars and receive \$15 per month or a total of \$45 each year. This was impossible so I contrived to secure a job carrying the mail on the Star route from Sylva to

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Page 5 to JRB. III.

Tuckaseegee--leaving Tuckaseegee on horseback each morning at 6 arriving at Sylva at 10 and leaving Sylva at 12 arriving back at Tuckaseegee at 5. By doing this I made the acquaintance of Mr R.M.Grasty who was the railroad agent , telegraph operator, etc at Sylva. He was a big fat lazy fellow and had no help. During my two hours in Sylva I would put on and take off the main from trains, sweep out the waiting rooms, and get him fresh water, buckets of coal and make myself generally useful. I did this from June until January when he offered to pay my room and board and teach me the railroad and telegraph business which was just what I had

¹⁸ Handwritten correction of letter "a" being removed.

been aching for. I started with him in January and the following September had a job at \$45 per month, the same amount in one month that I could have earned in 1 year teaching school. I worked a while at Hickory, N.C. Trenton, S.C. Burroughs, Ga, Walthourville, Ga, now called Ludowici, Ga. Then I went to Newyorkcity, worked for W.U.Tel Company at 814 South Broadway, then for WU at Grand Central Station, then I went to DL&W RR over in Hoboken, NJ. All this time my Aunt was staying alone at the old home place. Her health was failing--I returned to Clyde, N.C. as Agent, then to Brysoncity, having her with me and where she died on Dec 25¹⁹, 06. This left no ties and I went back to Newyorkcity, soon to leave for Chicago, where I entered Bennet Medical College days and worked for Western Union Tel Co nights. I left Ga going to NYCity in July 1904. I matriculated²⁰ in Bennet which is now Loyola University in June 1908 and should have graduated in 1912. But I could not earn enough nights to live and pay tuition, so after spending 4 years in College I failed to graduate. I went to Arkansas and secured a permit to practice and after securing \$100 I went to Kansascity, Mo and put in another year in the Eclectic Medical University from which I received my first M.D. May 7 1917.²¹ In the Spring of 1925 I went to Pavia Italy matriculated in their Royal University and received my degree of M.D. a second time on July 23rd 1925.²² This is the oldest University in the World.

I hope to leave you enough for you and your mother so that you will not have the hardships I have had. It is a handicap to graduate from a poor school, not that you are un-educated and uninformed but in this day and age its the standing of the school that counts. I have an insurance policy that will be paying you \$200 per month for 8 years when you reach the age of 18 and if I am gone I want you to remember that Dady was thinking of his baby boy and providing for his education. I would have you be a doctor of Medicine and a Mason. When you are old enough to enter Medical school any of them will be good enough but Tulane at Neworleans

¹⁹ Handwritten correction to 26th of December.

²⁰ Handwritten removal of "r"

²¹ Brinkley attended Bennett Medical College and the Eclectic Medical University, schools criticized for lax standards, and that he relied on reciprocity laws to obtain licenses, and practiced goat-gland transplantation in Milford. See Powell's *NCpedia* biography of John R. Brinkley, *The Handbook of Texas*, and *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas* for more information.

²² Brinkley visited the Royal University of Pavia in July 1925, took examinations, and received a medical degree; but the American Medical Association pressured Mussolini to revoke it. See Wood's and Lee for more information.

will give you the Southern Gentleman flavor and Jefferson at Philadelphia will give you the Northern business Man's force of character.

I hope to live and show you the places I have mentioned and point out the many places Daddy was as a little boy, but if I should not, then this memorandum will serve to acquaint you and Mother can tell you the rest.

Your loving father,
Jno. R Brinkley MD

I wrote this one the typewriter in my office this Sunday afternoon while you were at the house sound asleep with Mama.²³

²³ Minerva ("Minnie") Telitha Jones Brinkley was John R. Brinkley's second wife and mother of the son he addresses in this letter. Multiple sources identify her as the daughter of Memphis physician Tiberius Gracchus Jones and notes that Brinkley met and married her while passing through Memphis shortly after the collapse of his first marriage to Sally Wike. Later biographical work clarifies that this relationship was legally complicated: Brinkley wed Minnie in Memphis in 1913 before a North Carolina divorce decree from Wike had been fully finalized and then went through a second ceremony with Jones in Liberty, Missouri, after the divorce was secure. As Brinkley's practice expanded from Arkansas into Milford, Kansas, and then Del Rio Texas, Minnie appeared in contemporary accounts as a partner in his enterprises, signing corporate documents, fronting banks, hospital ventures, and helping manage the radio and mail-order operations that surrounded the goat gland clinic. Sources also show that when federal prosecutors finally moved against Brinkley's organization, Minnie was indicted alongside her husband; and after his death in 1942, she plead nolo contendere to mail fraud related charges and received a \$5,000 fine and three years' probation, a sentence that effectively closed out the "Brinkley Era" in Arkansas. Taken together, these sources confirm the outline of the marriage given in this editions introduction and help explain why the 1928 letter imagines "Mother" and son as legitimate heirs to Brinkley's wealth and respectability, even as outside observers were already treating his medical practices with suspicion. See William Powell's *NCpedia* entry on John Romulus Brinkley, Albert J. Schneider's *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* article, on John Richard Brinkley, Clement Wood's *The Life of a Man*, and R. Alton Lee's *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley* for further biological details, and P.C. Smith's "John R. Brinkley: A Quintessential American Quack" for discussion of the irregular second marriage and Minnie's role in his business affairs.

ANNOTATED WORKS CITED

Allen, Paula. “‘Goat-gland’ Doctor Moved His Family to Texas after Troubles in Kansas.” *San Antonio Express-News*, 11 Feb. 2023, <https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/goat-gland-doctor-texas-17778122.php>.

Local history column that reconstructs the Brinkley family’s move from Kansas to Del Rio and later San Antonio, drawing on Kansas Historical Society images, Gerald Carson’s *The Roguish World of Dr. Brinkley*, and other secondary sources. Allen highlights Minnie Brinkley’s role alongside her husband and emphasizes their only child, John Richard Brinkley III (“Johnny Boy”), describing his early radio performances, schooling under tutors and bodyguards, and continued presence in the Del Rio mansion’s broadcast room. This piece provides vivid, family-centered detail that supports the notes on Minnie’s status as Brinkley’s second wife and business partner and on “Johnnie Boy” as a carefully stage-managed child performer, helping to contextualize the affectionate tone and omissions in Brinkley’s family-history letter to his son.

Ancestry Library Edition. Ancestry, 1997–2025. 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 to John Richard Brinkley III, Dec. 2, 1928.” *Dr. John R. Brinkley Papers*. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS. Collection 107 (Kansas Memory digital surrogate).

Primary family history document for this edition; it supplies the graveyard directions, childhood on the Tuckasegee, and the “money will haunt you if not honestly earned” speech that I read against later biographies.

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.

“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. <https://files.core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232564985.pdf>

Biography tracing Brinkley’s medical schemes, radio empire, legal troubles, and eventual financial collapse. I used 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.

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 all three documents.

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.

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.

Priestley, Kent, et al. “Homes Alone: The Stories of Four Historic Mountain Structures.” *Smoky Mountain Living*, 1 Dec. 2011, <https://www.smliv.com/stories/homes-alone-the-stories-of-four-historic-mountain-structure/>.

Includes Brinkley's East Laporte cottage and notes that he bought back his birth property and erected a monument to Aunt Sally. This directly supports the graveyard directions and "home place" pride in the 1928 letter.

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.

Smith, Philip C. "John R. Brinkley: A Quintessential American Quack." *Journal of Community Hospital Internal Medicine Perspectives*, vol. 12, no. 5, 9 Sept. 2022, pp. 1–5, doi:10.55729/2000-9666.1095. PMC, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9529641/>.

Recent peer-reviewed medical history article that synthesizes earlier scholarship on Brinkley's education, marriages, goat-gland practice, and media career. Smith confirms the broad biographical arc used in this edition (early itinerant work with Sally Wike, subsequent marriage to Minnie Telitha Jones, eclectic medical schooling, Milford goat-gland operations, and later Del Rio / border-radio years) and helps frame Brinkley as a textbook case of quackery in twentieth-century U.S. medicine. I use Smith primarily to corroborate dates and transitions already drawn from Lee, Wood, and reference entries, and to underscore how later historians characterize Brinkley's career and methods when contextualizing the 1928 letter and later family correspondence.

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.