

Letter from Minnie Brinkley to Amanda Jackson

April 23, 1937

HL_SM_24-01_BrinkleyM-1938-April23

Transcribed by Christian Henderson

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 TO THE DOCUMENT

This document is a letter from Minnie Brinkley, John Brinkley II's wife, to "Aunt" Amanda Jackson.

John Brinkley II was a notorious quack doctor who 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 in unsanitary conditions. He also built a radio station in Mexico that boasted the most powerful transmitter at the time. One of the most concerning parts of his radio shows was the "Medical Question Box," segment where he gave medical advice to listeners and recommended "cures" that were only available from pharmacies affiliated with John Brinkley II (Lee, Alton).

John Brinkley II's downfall began in 1938 after suing Morris Fishbein, a journalist who regularly called him a "quack" and "charlatan," for libel. John Brinkley II 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).

Minnie Brinkley was involved in John Brinkley's business, often traveling with him and even working as an anesthesiologist at times. She was also indicted along with her husband for mail fraud, though the case was dismissed due to John Brinkley's death (Lee, Alton). She remained a staunch supporter of her husband until her death in 1980 ("Minerva Telitha "Minnie" Jones Brinkley).

Amanda Jackson was a neighbor to young John Brinkley and often watched him growing up. She became a close family friend who both Minnie and John Brinkley wrote often. She lived in East LaPort, NC, close to modern day Sylva, NC, until her death in 1945 (Lee, Alton).

In April 1937, the Brinkleys were arguably reaching the height of their wealth. The Brinkley family moved to Del Rio Texas in 1933, shortly after John Brinkley's Mexican radio station, XER, began broadcasting. They built a mansion in Del Rio, though the family often traveled with John Brinkley for his work. They were set to embark on a four month long European tour shortly after writing this letter (Lee, Alton). This would be just one year before his disastrous lawsuit loss to Morris Fishbein.

Minnie mentions "the home place" throughout this letter. This could be a reference to the farm that the Brinkley family purchased in 1936 from John Brinkley's former mother-in-law. This became their summer home and is referred to as "the old home area" in his biographies (Lee, Alton). For more information on "the home place," please reference the in-text annotations.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

This transcription is a diplomatic edition, meaning that it has been transcribed as closely to the original text as possible in order to preserve the meaning, layout, and integrity of the primary document.

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.

The document is written on a cream-colored paper that is 7.5 in by 10.5 in. The letter is one page front and back and written in ink. It is folded three times horizontally. The header of the letter, which is included in the appendix, has a blue illustration of a building with “Doctor Brinkley” written underneath. It can be assumed that this building is Brinkley’s hospital.

The envelope, which is included in the appendix, is 9.25x4.25 inches, blue, and torn vertically from the right-hand side. The sender’s address is printed on the envelope while Amanda Jackson’s address is written by a typewriter in blue ink. The postage stamp is a physical stamp rather than printed on. There is a stamp that indicates the time and date the letter was sent and where it was sent from. It is interesting to note that the stamp says that the letter was sent on April 22, 1937 while the letter indicates that it was written on April 23, 1937. There is also a stamp on the back of the envelope that indicates that it was received in East LaPort.

TRANSCRIPTION

[MS page 1]

Dr. Brinkley April 23, 1937

My Dear Aunt Mandy:

We appreciated your sweet letter.

All of us are well. We are so thankful.

Won't be long until we see you =

Will be leaving Del Rio by plane

May first th Kansas City, MO. on via

Memphis Tenn to visit my sister for a night

then to North Carolina probably fifth or

sixth.¹ Good time made be made by plane.

Many miles in few hours at one hundred

ninety miles an hour.

Dr. Brinkley is giving a big garden party
to several hundred (near 1,500) Del Rioians
on next Sunday as a jesture of "good will."²

[MS pg. 2]

¹ Minnie Jones Brinkley has two sisters, Lillian Jones Munal and Evalyn Jones Chase. City directories have both women living in Memphis TN from birth to at least the late 1930s. Minnie could be referencing either of her sisters. While she refers to "sister" in the singular, it would also make sense that she could visit both of them while in Memphis. ("City and Area Directories.")

While the wording seems to denote that they made a plane trip before this letter was sent, there is no record of where the Brinkleys were coming from prior to arriving at Del Rio TX. However, if Minnie is referring to the trip they will be making in May, she could be referring to the amount of time it takes to get from Del Rio TX to Kansas City MO, Kansas City MO to Memphis TN, or Memphis TN to East LaPort NC (close to modern day Sylva NC).

The distance from Del Rio TX to Kansas City MO is 883 miles, meaning that at this speed, it would take approximately 4.6 hours to fly there. Kansas City MO is approximately 451 miles from Memphis TN, meaning that the flight would take about 2.4 hours. Memphis TN is approximately 505 miles from Sylva NC, meaning that the flight would take 2.6 hours. "A few hours" typically denotes 3 or more hours so if Minnie is referencing this trip, she is most likely referring to the distance from Del Rio to Kansas City.

² Just before leaving for their European tour, the Brinkley's hosted a party for the people of Del Rio and Villa Acuna as a "bon voyage reception." The lavish party was themed as a "Japanese fairyland," complete with games, food, music, prizes, and fireworks. 1,350 guests attended (Lee).

We will be gone from Del Rio four months if our plans carry³; so we do not want to be forgotten or not remembered with appreciation for the citizens good will.

Glad you call on the Petersons⁴ at the home place. John is known as a human dynamo always working.

Mr. Wike ^{sr} had that reputation so maybe the old place will appreciate a new tiller of the soil.⁵

Johnnie anticipates his visit there, he has made big preparations to fish and hunt. Plans big on killing a few. (bear)

Until we arrive we all send love to you all.

I usually write on a typewriter
so try and read this long hand.

Sincerely
Ms. JR Brinkley

³ The Brinkleys European tour lasted from June to August 1937. Given the locations they visited prior to their tour, they would be away from home from May to August, approximately four months (Lee).

⁴ In 1936, the Brinkleys purchased a farm in Jackson County from Laura Wike, the mother of his first wife Sallie Wike. This became a summer home for the family. Brinkley expanded his investment and eventually owned seven thousand acres on the Plott Balsam mountain range near the Addie community (“1930: Addie”). Throughout Brinkleys biographies, this is referred to as his “home area,” so it would make sense for Minnie to reference this as “the homeplace.” While I could not find records on the residents of the homeplace, based on the wording of this letter, we can assume that the Petersons and Mike Sr. lived there. For more information about “the homeplace” see Introduction.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“City and Area Directories.” *Ancestry Library*.

https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/search/categories/dir_city/. Accessed 10 December 2025.

“Hughes H-1 Racer.” *National Air and Space Museum*, https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/hughes-h-1-racer/nasm_A19750840000. Accessed 10 December 2025.

This resource was used to locate the fastest speeds that an aircraft could travel in the 1930s.

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.

“Minerva Telitha “Minnie” Jones Brinkley.” *FindAGrave*,

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40234166/minerva_telitha-brinkley, Accessed 8 December 2025.

This resource was used to locate information about Lillian Munal and Evalyn Chase, Minnie Brinkley’s sisters.

“Motoring through the Mountains – 1930: Addie.” *Hunter Library Digital Programs and Special Collections at Western Carolina University*,

<https://www.wcu.edu/library/digitalcollections/travelwnc/1930s/1930addie.html>.

Accessed 10 December 2025.

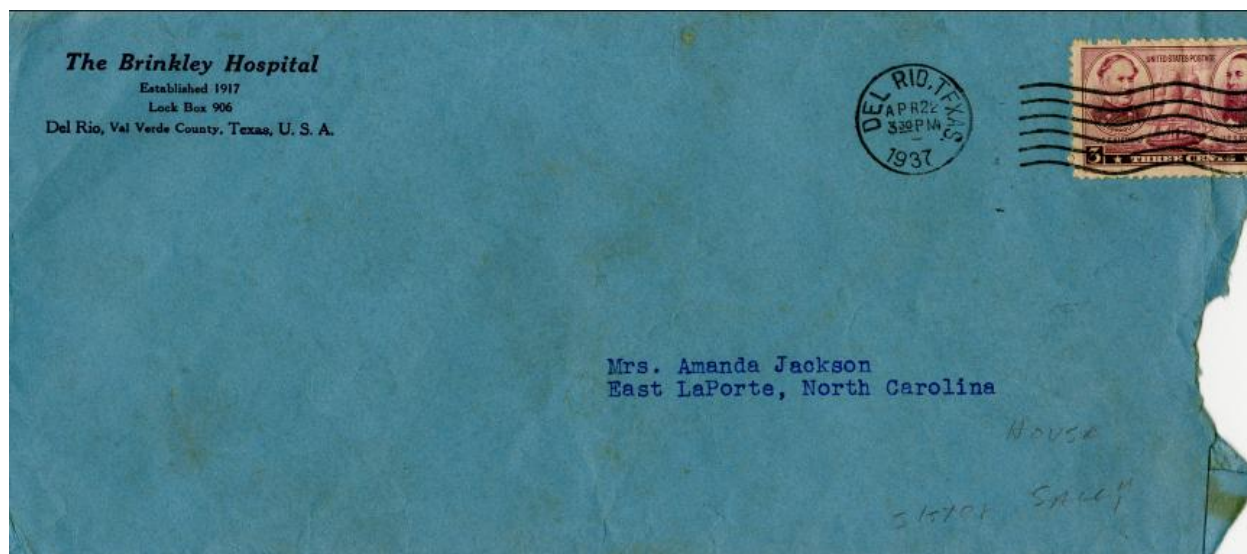
This resource was used to gather information on the land that John Brinkley purchased, presumably “the home place.”

APPENDIX A



Letterhead for April 23, 1937 letter from Minnie Brinkley to Amanda Jackson

APPENDIX B



Envelope for April 23, 1937 letter from Minnie Brinkley to Amanda Jackson