The Wizard of Milford

Dr. J. R. Brinkley and Brinkleyism

by Francis W. Schruben

A n appraisal of Dr. J. R. Brinkley’s medical practice and Brinkleyism (the doctor’s political movement) necessitates a recounting of the career of the “Wizard” of Milford, Kansas, usually remembered as the “goat gland” rejuvenation surgeon. At present, who really remembers Brinkleyism? Debatably, scarcely anyone. But as an independent write-in candidate in 1930 and as an independent on the ballot in 1932, low-income Kansans by the tens of thousands supported Dr. Brinkley’s quest to become their governor.

In its appeal to those who believed they were forgotten and downtrodden, Kansas Brinkleyism of the 1930s to some degree may be likened to Kansas Populism of the 1890s—both sprang from the demands of the people. The Populist platform was presented by an organized party; Brinkleyism originated from suggestions mailed in by his followers, organized by advisors, and crafted into a political credo. Both offered relief and reform, carried some of the same counties, and eventually saw many of their proposals co-opted and enacted through the Democratic and Republican parties.

Historians and others have scarcely noted the similarities of Brinkleyism and Populism. Some writers have been so eager to exploit the sensationalism attending the flamboyant Dr. Brinkley’s surgical endeavors, they have neglected serious consideration of Brinkleyism as a political movement.

Francis W. Schruben received his B.A. and M.A. from the Municipal University of Wichita, his Ph.D. in history from UCLA, and was professor of history at Pierce College, Woodland Hills, California, from 1958 until his retirement in 1989. His numerous literary contributions include Kansas in Turmoil, 1930-1936.


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At the same time, the more exotic aspects of his medical and surgical theories and practices should not be overlooked, in themselves and in relation to other efforts toward sexual revitalization. Notice is also due Dr. Brinkley’s procedures in light of modern-day advancement in organ transfers. Was Dr. Brinkley an innovative pioneer in rejuvenation? Did he experience any success? Was he a genius or a quack? Or could he be placed in both camps?

Born at Beta, North Carolina, in 1885, according to one account, John Romulus (later Richard) Brinkley was the son of John Richard Brinkley, a country physician, and his fifth wife, Sarah Candace Burnett. Another version holds that he was “apparently the illegitimate son of Dr. John Richard Brinkley and his wife’s niece, Sarah Candace Burnett [sic].” Orphaned as a small boy, Johnny Brinkley, who knew grinding poverty, was fortunate in being raised by his loving Aunt Sally. Their humble cabin, near the verdant banks of the Tuckasegee River, provided scarce shelter from the elements. But Aunt Sally’s solicitude and guidance, pride in his heritage, and the rugged highland life developed unyielding tenacity and tremendous ambition in the lad. It may be that believing himself to be a natural child created empathy for the lower economic classes and also helped bring about his rise through ambition, willpower, cunning, and intelligence to international attention in the 1920s.

After shadowy early years, including employment as a telegrapher in Memphis, Brinkley attempted to emulate his father. He studied in recognized schools like Loyola University and in transitory institutions such as the Midlandensis Universitatis Chicagoensis Seminarium Scientarium and Kansas City’s Eclectic Medical University. About 1915, if we accept tradition, he received a medical license in Arkansas and, through reciprocity, one in Kansas.

Following short-lived attempts to begin practice elsewhere in the state, Dr. Brinkley and his second wife, Minnie Talethea Jones Brinkley, located in tiny Fulton in southeast Kansas, where he became mayor. Returning in 1917 from brief service as an army

2. William S. Powell, ed., Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, 4 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 1:228. That he was a natural child is seen on the inscription Dr. Brinkley placed on his mother’s large “Angel” gravestone in a cemetery near Sylva, North Carolina: SARAH CANDACE BURNETT.


physician, he found the town had acquired another doctor. Answering a newspaper advertisement for a general practitioner, he resettled in Milford, a small town close to Junction City. In Milford, Brinkley’s reputation as a physician grew from seeing his patients through the devastating 1918 influenza epidemic. Mrs. Brinkley recalled in March 1978 that the doctor, by encouraging patients to eat, use trusted old remedies, and take plenty of laxatives, never lost a one to flu.5

With this enhanced reputation, Brinkley soon embarked upon the career for which he is remembered. He hit upon the possibility of human sexual rejuvenation by implanting testicle segments from vigorous young billy goats into aging but appetitive men. The idea may have occurred to him while studying the research of such European scientists as Eugene Steinach and Serge Voronoff. Dr. David Hamilton’s recent treatise recognizes that Brinkley’s use of goat glands as a means of rejuvenation predated Voronoff’s use of monkey testicle implants for the same purpose. Brinkley came to use such terms as the 4-phase compound for his opera-6

tions. Whatever the procedure’s name, place of origin, or actual results, using glands from inodorous young Toggenburg billy goats, Brinkley’s acclaim and bank account grew throughout the 1920s.

In 1922, the Brinkleys traveled to Los Angeles where the doctor operated on Harry Chandler, the influential publisher of the Times, and many of his companions and employees. Taking his cue from Chandler’s radio station KHI, Brinkley, upon returning to Milford some months later, developed his own station, KFKB (Kansas First Kansas Best), to draw patients to his hospital. A variety of musicians from the Fort Riley Band to western, folk, ballroom orchestra, and semi-classical attracted a wide listening audience. In 1928, he began his “Medical Question Box” replying to listeners who wrote KFKB describing their sundry ailments in the hope of finding relief. After filling some prescriptions from his Milford


7. Schruben, “Early Kansas Radio Station,” Kansasinte 12 (December 1966). WAAP (Wichita), not KFKB, was Kansas’ first commercial station.
drugstore, Brinkley soon advised his correspondents to visit a local affiliate pharmacy and ask for a numbered formula. For each he received a substantial fee. 

The late 1920s and early 1930s marked Dr. Brinkley’s high flight. His manner became grandiose and flamboyant. His striking goatee and his piercing but friendly eyes caught and held attention. His attire, sparkling with enormous diamonds (rings, cuff links, tie clasp, and stick pin), bordered on the garish. Yet somehow these did not seem out of place on the doctor, at least not to his devotees. At his disposal were numerous automobiles, including a “block-long” Cadillac and a custom-built Lincoln. Mrs. Brinkley sported a Stutz Bearcat that she drove to nearby Junction City to pick up medical supplies. When he desired or was in a hurry, Brinkley traveled in his own Wichita-built Travel Air (later Beech Aircraft) monoplane. 

Mrs. Brinkley and their son, Johnny Boy, became well known to KFKB’s vast radio following. The doctor was proud of them. His wife, a “doctor” herself, was his chief assistant, and Johnny Boy was the darling of their hearts. The tot became a listeners’ favorite, loved for singing “Happy Birthday!”

But Brinkley’s golden decade was not to continue. He was beset by tormentors who had professional, economic, and personal motives. Naturally, the Kansas Board of Medical Regulation and Examination assailed him. Although its members had professional reasons, jealousy likely prompted many grievances. Possibly the orthodox doctors were joined by pharmacists not fortunate enough to belong to KFKB’s prescription network. Perhaps many envied the high-flying Dr. Brinkley, the opulent Wizard of Milford.

Even more scathing attacks came from Dr. Morris Fishbein, executive secretary of the monopolistic American Medical Association. Beginning in 1928, Fishbein devoted a large part of his career to hammering Brinkley. When the Milford specialist was stripped of his license by the Kansas Medical Board, Fishbein pursued Brinkley to Del Rio, Texas, and in time provided court evidence that helped destroy the doctor financially. Reminiscing in 1978, Mrs. Brinkley recalled that her husband had attended university classes with Fishbein, whom she described as having


10. John R. Brinkley III (Johnny Boy) recalled difficulty pronouncing “Happy Birthday.” He did not even know what the words meant.

11. Carson, The Ragish World of Doctor Brinkley, 221-28; The Case of Brinkley vs. Fishbein: Proceedings of a Libel Suit Based on an Article Published in Hygeia (Chicago: American Medical Association, 1939). The suit was brought first before the U.S. District Court in Del Rio, Tex., March 1939.
been a “poor Jew boy.” Fishbein, she said, was simply jealous of Brinkle’s success. 12

Another hard-hitting antagonist was the Kansas City Star, whose radio station had lost an important popularity contest to Brinkle’s KFKB. In 1930, the Star, conducting what would be termed investigative reporting, sent A. B. Macdonald, its award-winning feature writer, to interview Brinkle. Macdonald’s stories belittled and slashed the doctor and his own gland operations, diamond-studded affluence, self-assurance, and style of life. Brinkle seemed to relish Macdonald’s onslaught, counting that he got “fat on fights.” 13

An indignant William Allen White also joined the hounds. White’s Emporia Gazette editorials righteously chastised Brinkle in the editor’s most caustic and witty manner. Only White could use such philippics, similar to those he used in the 1920s to help rid Kansas of the noisome Ku Klux Klan.

In mid-June 1930, these and other onslaughts resulted in the Federal Radio Commission’s (FRC) voting three to two not to renew KFKB’s permit. In September, after a hearing before Kansas doctors—including Wichita’s Dr. E. S. Edgerton, president of the Kansas Medical Society—to determine if Brinkle should be stripped of his license, Attorney General William Smith arbitrarily cut off available testimony from a large number of pro-Brinkle witnesses. Smith’s motives were perhaps more political than judicial. The license was revoked. 14

Wounded, Brinkle was by no means defeated or suppressed. Although he could no longer practice in Kansas, he carried on at Milford, using surgeons already on his staff plus those he could employ when needed. In addition, the groundwork already had been laid that would lead to his move to Del Rio, Texas. There his organization utilized much of the recently-opened Roswell Hotel. 15 Family-style medicine was available—for those wishing to accompany a patient, rooms were available on a separate floor.

During the Del Rio years (1933-1938), Brinkle shifted his emphasis from gland rejuvenations to prostate removals or treatments. Moreover, transplants gave way to purported sexual renewal by injections of glandular essences. This new focus resulted in part from the actions of a cut-rate surgeon who sometimes sidetracked Roswell Hotel-bound patients. Brinkle had experienced similar difficulties in Kansas. Warnings were given over XER (Brinkle’s radio station across Mexico’s border) to beware of these body snatchers. Meanwhile, radio messages urged sufferers from painful prostate blockage to come to Del Rio where a Brinkle surgeon could skillfully treat or extract the enlarged gland. Make haste! And, the ads cautioned, be sure to avoid the predatory doctor or his agents on the way. 16

The Brinkleys purchased the Paul Edwards mansion along Hudson Drive in south Del Rio, elaborately refurbishing it and the grounds. Gold-colored letters displayed Dr. Brinkle’s name on the wrought iron gates. A custom-made pipe organ, manufactured by the Reuter Organ Company of Lawrence, Kansas, was installed. This remarkable instrument could be played manually or by prepared rolls. The doctor loved organ music and used it as background for his broadcasts. There were lighted tennis courts, a swimming pool, and a sumptuous rose garden. Fountains played in the lawn, and statues were emplaced. Accessible within a few hours by automobile was the family yacht, at anchor in the Gulf of Mexico. The luxuriously appointed Dr. Brinkley II was soon joined by the larger and more elegant Dr. Brinkley III. 17

15. Interview with Bass Bradley, Del Rio, Tex., March 1978; Canzon, The Regalish World of Doctor Brinkley, 180, passim.
17. See also radio broadcast recordings, 1939, Brinkle Collection, Manuscripts Dep’t, Kansas State Historical Society; and, for a negative view, Albert J. Schneider, “That Troublesome Old Cocklebur: John R. Brinkle and the Medical Profession of Arkansas, 1937-1942,” Arkansas Historical Quarterly 35 (Spring 1976): 27-46.
After Mexican federal government obstacles were lifted (with the aid of Vice-President Charles Curtis), and after the doctor faced down blackmail attempts by area políticos, Brinkley began building his radio station directly across the Rio Grande, XER, the “Sunshine Station Between the Nations,” with one of the world’s most powerful transmitters, burst on the air in early 1931 with a joyous personal greeting from Dr. J. R. Brinkley to his friends everywhere.  

Previously, Brinkley’s greatest counterstroke came back in Kansas when he ran for governor in 1930 as an independent, write-in candidate. With his medical practice under attack, the Milford practitioner enlisted the aid of the wily Levand brothers and their impetuous Wichita Beacon. In response to Dr. Brinkley’s call for help, Max Levand sent H. G. Hotchkiss, a skillful publicist, to Milford. After studying the difficulties, Hotchkiss strongly suggested that Brinkley take the offensive by running for governor. On his lawyer’s advice, he initially rejected this strategy. But later, when he decided to run and the campaign began, the Beacon, although not endorsing him, ran Brinkley political advertisements and lent Hotchkiss as a full-time publicist and tactician.

Enthusiastic help also came from the Rev. Harry A. Boone, a Wichita barber and preacher; from journalist and linotype operator Ernest A. Dewey, who reportedly came from California in response to an advertisement; and from Cash Davis, an all-out supporter from rural Augusta. As the drive got underway, others answered the call, including the aggressive, former Norton County Populist Elmer J. Garner, an editor and publisher destined for a large role in Brinkley’s subsequent career.

After first circling the area—a crowd-pleasing maneuver popularized by Charles A. Lindbergh—Brinkley’s sleek cabin monoplane swooped down onto Cash Davis’s pasture, halfway between Augusta and Wichita. There, on October 26, 1930, he addressed the largest political assemblage, estimated at twenty thousand or more, in Kansas history. Accompanied, as usual, by Mrs. Brinkley and Johnny Boy, the doctor landed promptly at 2:00 p.m. but did not speak until 2:45, when most of the immense crowd had finally arrived. By automobile they had driven from twenty-five Kansas counties to hear the radio doctor turned politician.

Because it was Sunday, Brinkley chose not to talk politics but spoke for half an hour about biblical passages. Brinkley biographer Gerald Carson noted that the doctor compared his troubles with those that had afflicted Jesus. No doubt, the Wizard felt persecuted, and with good reason. Often he deftly mixed scripture with political and medical messages. His adoring audience hung onto every word. Just seeing him captivated many, and those who managed to touch him or shake his hand were left elated.

18. William E. Unrau, Mixed-Bloods and Tribal Dissolution: Charles Curtis and the Quest for Indian Identity (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 167-68. See also Schruben, Kansas in Turmoil, 82.


20. Carson, The Roqueish World of Doctor Brinkley, 162; Wichita Eagle, October 27, 1930; Wichita Beacon, October 27, 1930.

Following an appeal of the FRC’s ruling, Brinkley retained access to KFKB, but Hotchkiss, fearing the doctor was relying too much on radio, arranged for yet another late October rally, this one at Wichita’s Forum. Here, on Tuesday, October 28, in what remains a masterpiece of political organization, Brinkley’s KFKB musicians entertained the audience as it settled. Then, as he did throughout the campaign, Roy Faulkner, the station’s “Lonely Cowboy,” put them in a receptive mood by singing “The Strawberry Roan.” The auditorium was soon packed, and following orders from the Wichita Fire Department, the doors were closed, leaving hundreds to mill around on the sidewalk outside, among them local party politicians who had not taken Brinkley seriously. Strand- ed, they stood “rubbing their chins,” baffled and bewildered.

Inside, just after Brinkley strode dramatically to the center of the stage, little Johnny Boy jumped from his seat beside his mother and stole the crowd’s affection by rushing up to his father to demand a drink of water from the carafe on the rostrum. “He’s the boss,” the doctor joked, as the tyke’s innocent upstaging brought a roar of laughter from exuberant onlookers.

Brinkley began speaking of his troubles with the medical and radio authorities, only to change suddenly and recount his impoverished youth. He identified with the poor, who had been neglected by budget-conscious politicians. He promised to pave the roads and take Kansas out of the mud. Commercial travel would be made easier; tourists would no longer wish to bypass the state. Changing focus again, Brinkley asserted that if the state failed to do so after he became governor, he would provide a free medical clinic at Milford for the needy. Taking a new direction, he assured the crowd he belonged to the American Legion, almost a prerequisite for office in those days, but asked his followers not to vote for him for that reason.

When the bearded Wizard finished, he thanked the faithful for listening and bade “each and everyone a good night.” With that he turned, enervated from weeks of campaigning, walked out a side door, and vanished into the night. Brinkley partisans were left enraptured, and his presence lingered. One is reminded of the words ascribed to Homer: “He ceas’d, but left so pleasant to the ear, his voice, that listening still they seemed to hear.” The dispirited had found their leader, the one who would deliver them from humiliation and hardship. Brinkleyism gathered momentum.

As it took shape, Brinkley’s 1930 platform included free schoolbooks, a gasoline tax that would help fund paving seven thousand miles of roads yearly, and a free clinic for the ailing needy (at his expense if not provided by the state). On October 23, the *Belleville News*—the first newspaper to do so—set forth the entire J. R. Brinkley program:

—require the use of Kansas-made products by state agencies wherever possible;
—repeal the Industrial Court Law, which had hampered industry and labor;


—set up an adequate compensation fund to cover industrial injuries and diseases;
—require convict-made products be sold only to state institutions and prohibit the sale of prison-made products from other states in Kansas;
—make available free medicines to the destitute and prescriptions at cost to the poor, these to be sold only through local druggists;
—provide state medical and surgical care for the poor;
—seek ratification of the Federal Child Labor Amendment;
—furnish free schoolbooks and eliminate the waste in the schoolbook business;
—reestablish a State Department of Labor and Industry, including as part of its function a survey of natural and industrial resources;
—lower taxes;
—allow the people ready access to the governor;
—create artificial lakes and ponds in Kansas in order to increase rainfall and provide recreational, vacation, and migratory bird facilities;
—require “short trains” as a safety factor for railroaders, and to maintain employment levels;
—establish state pensions for the elderly, the blind, and those unable to work;
—eliminate the “disgrace” of the county poor farms;
—eliminate the American Medical Association-controlled Basic Science Law, which favored “M.D.’s” over such “drugless healers” as chiropractors and osteopaths;
—oppose “corporation farming” as “unjust to the [family] farmer”;

—use the radio to give “wide publicity” to constituent letters to the governor.24

Whoever drew up Brinkley’s 1930 program evidently did not know that, although the law was still on the books, the Kansas Industrial Court had been rendered ineffective by the Wolff Packing Company decision of 1923 and abolished in 1925.25 Brinkley’s call, however, for pensions for the blind, poor, and those unable to work, predated the 1933 Townsend Plan which called for $200 monthly federal payments to those who retired at age sixty.26 In addition to his broad agenda, Dr. Brinkley used the slogan: “CLEAN OUT, CLEAN UP, AND KEEP KANSAS CLEAN.” His proposals went far beyond the modest reforms offered by the Democrats’ Harry Woodring and the Republicans’ Frank “Chief” Hauke who, like New York’s Franklin D. Roosevelt and other gubernatorial aspirants at the time, called for a balanced budget, tax reduction, and fiscally responsible government.27

The doctor’s chance for electoral success, however, was greatly hindered by his late September announcement which precluded his name being placed on the ballot. A conflict arose. A 1923 Kansas statute allowed voter intent, however a name was written in, to be used in determining a ballot’s validity. Nevertheless, Attorney General William Smith dictatorially ruled that separate tallies be kept for ballots cast for J. R. Brinkley, Dr. Brinkley, Doc Doctor Brinkley, John R. Brinkley, Dr. John R. Brinkley, and the like. Brinkley scored this as cruel obfuscation, and so it was, but a separate count procedure was followed. Thus, despite his efforts to have “J. R. BRINKLEY” (the name registered with the Kansas Secretary of State) penciled on the ballot and followed by an X in the proper box, enough ballots were invalidated and discarded by perhaps frightened, cynical, or dishonest recorders to possibly have cost Brinkley the election.28

The late John R. Peach, of Topeka and Emporia, who knew the inner workings of Kansas politics, once stated from first-hand knowledge that a Democratic or Republican counter would make an additional entry on a Brinkley ballot and then suddenly exclaim in effect, “Look here! Someone has made an extra mark and spoiled his vote!” Another reliable narrative has it that Riley County poll watchers would engage in conversation those who appeared unsure how to cast their ballots. The uncertain who intended voting for Brinkley

26. See Townsend letter to the Long Beach, Calif., Press-Telegram, September 30, 1933. Apparently there was no Brinkley-Townsend communication and no detectable mass movement between the two camps.
were advised, "He’s a fine man and he will want to know about your vote. Be sure you sign your name on the bottom of the ballot." Everywhere marked or signed ballots were tossed into the Brinkley bone pile, and voter intent was overlooked.

In addition to the hurry-burly attending the Brinkley candidacy, the contest between Woodring and Haucke was hard-fought. The polls closed November 4, but the election was not decided until November 16 when Woodring was finally certified as having won. He received 217,171 votes, to Hauck’s 216,920, and Brinkley’s 183,278.29

Woodring won because the regular parties dropped counter legal actions over whether or not the votes from the residents in the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, located on federal property in Leavenworth, should be counted. In 1958, E. R. Sloan, federal referee in bankruptcy and a practicing attorney, recalled that in 1938 he had been able to persuade the Kansas Supreme Court to sustain a district court’s ruling that votes from the National Home for Leavenworth County treasurer were not valid. Being on federal property in 1938 precluded the Home’s residents from voting for state, county, and local offices. The Home was on the same federal property in 1930; therefore, by the same logic, the votes giving the election to Harry H. 29. Conversation with John Peach, Topeka, July-August 1959; interview with Frank Haucke, Council Grove, August 29, 1958; Homer E. Socolofsky, Manhattan, to author, September 12, 1959; Donald R. McCoy, London of Kansas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 95.


In 1920, Dr. Brinkley journeyed to New York to demonstrate his goat gland transplant surgery. He is assisted here by his wife.

Woodring were illegal. But they were counted, and with them went the election.

Moreover, in recent years, key plausible evidence has appeared from Dennis Shockley’s interview with the late Carl V. Rice, an early Woodring backer in 1930. Rice revealed that the Republicans, presented with irrefragable proof that they had been guilty of gross fraud in certain Kansas City precincts, decided they had no choice but to allow the National Home’s votes to stand for Woodring. An accommodation was made, and both sides dropped their objections. Neither party wanted the returns examined at the state level. A review might have placed Brinkley in the governor’s chair, an unthinkable proposition for either side.30

Evidence also indicates that Frank Haucke believed he too received a short count. In a 1958 interview, he indicated that perhaps the partisans of Governor Reed, whom Haucke had defeated in the bitter primary, had conspired to disallow enough absentee ballots to defeat

30. Interview with E. R. Sloan, Topeka, August 29, 1958; Schruben, Kansas in Turmoil, 39. The Kansas Supreme Court sustained the Leavenworth district court ruling that the National Home vote was illegal. See Herken v. Clyner in Kansas Reports 151 (Topeka: State Printer, 1940) 855. Shockley, Kansas City, interview with Rice, in letter to author, July 10, 1960; interview with Haucke, August 29, 1958; information on Herken v. Clyner from Fritz Snyder, School Law Librarian, University of Kansas, and Fred Knueft, Law Library, Kansas Supreme Court.
him. Haucke also believed he would have won if the Old Soldiers' vote had not been awarded to Woodrung. From newspaper accounts, Haucke does not appear to have protested and, though disenchanted, he remained a party man.22

For six decades the Brinkley short count has been rehashed. Several years ago in answer to letters and interviews, Republicans generally—with Haucke the notable exception—firmly asserted that Brinkley had not been unjustly denied the governorship. Although terming the write-in vote a remarkable tribute, Alf Landon stated flatly that Brinkley "got every vote that was coming to him." But the Democrats, including Woodrung who was no friend of Brinkley's, insisted just as emphatically that had all ballots intended for the doctor been properly tallied, he would have become governor.23

Reportedly, because of the expense involved, Brinkley did not demand a recount. Some historians have contended that because his name was not on the ballot, he could not legally have obtained a new tally—an erroneous conclusion according to many present-day authorities.24 Whatever the case, Dr. Brinkley, so Hotchkiss believed, had achieved his purposes of "saving his medical business" and "scaring hell out of" the American Medical Association, the orthodox Kansas doctors, and the party politicians.25

Be that as it may, why Brinkley did not demand a recount remains a mystery. At the time, political writer W. G. Clugston and Cash Davis stated that the expense was too heavy, but in 1930 most of the Brinkley fortune was intact. No doubt, the doctor was concerned about the many unresolved problems created by the Kansas medical authorities and the FRC, which would demand his closest attention. And perhaps he did not really want to be governor. In 1958, Hotchkiss pointed out that Brinkley could have earned more in a month with his medical enterprises than he could have in two years as governor. He had realized lasting fame, achieved martyrdom with his followers, and gained sympathy from many fair-minded observers. Doubtless he would have found great satisfaction and vindication in reading his name in gold letters over the door of the governor's office, but, to repeat, the lack of a recount has never been fully explained.26

Following the 1930 short count, Brinkley continued formulating plans. The Milford hospital was functional, but Dr. Brinkley,


34. Fritz Snyder, University of Kansas Law Library, to author, October 10, 1989, indicated that Brinkley was entitled to a recount; Lissa Holzhausen, School of Law Library, Washburn University, Topeka, memorandum to author, 1990.


36. Hotchkiss, "Brinkley Campaigns," 7; and interview with Hotchkiss, August 29, 1958; Carson, The Regalio World of Doctor Brinkley, 166-67; Ralph O. "Joe" Cassity, Norman, Okla., to author, May 14, 1990. Carson's assertion that Brinkley "even polled 20,000 votes in Oklahoma" is in error. Write-in voting has never been legal under that state's constitution.
who had lost his Kansas medical license, felt victimized, and his followers continued to believe he had been defrauded. As their anger mounted, Brinkleyism hardened into a fighting crusade. Led by Mollie Vosberg of Hutchinson, the movement continued to grow. Mrs. Vosberg, a superb organizer, began forming Brinkley Clubs all across Kansas.

In addition to Mrs. Vosberg's dedicated hard work, Publicity, a pro-Brinkley Wichita tabloid, brought out its first issue on November 20, 1930. Published by fire-spouting, hard-bitten E. J. Garner, Publicity continuously blistered Brinkley's foes and sang the doctor's praises. During the 1930 campaign, Garner had been the secretary of Wichita's Brinkley Club.

On February 15, 1932, in answer to what he termed urgent requests from his followers, Dr. Brinkley announced he would again seek the governor's office. Ernest Dewey, now of Hutchinson, would continue as campaign director; but Hotchkiss, disturbed by Brinkley's reliance on such persons as Evangeline Adams, nationally-known astrologer, dropped out only to return upon request to help guide publicity and stratagems. In addition, Burt Comer, a disgruntled Wichita lawyer, leaped into the struggle as candidate for attorney general on the doctor's ticket, as did Ella S. Burton, who ran for state superintendent of public instruction. In 1930, Burton had unsuccessfully sought the office as a Democrat.

This time Brinkley's name was on the ballot as an independent. In addition to the team of Comer, Burton, Dewey, Hotchkiss, Cash-Davis, Garner, Vosberg, and the Rev. Boone, the doctor's supporters included hosts of activists, exemplified by the statewide Brinkley Clubs, and just plain people. Brinkley's commoners were determined to see their champion in the statehouse. He would help them in their sorrow and see them through their distress. They were thrilled and stirred by his mellow, confident, southern voice, his piercing blue eyes, his reddish-blonde goatee. Everywhere at his rallies, their campaign song proclaimed, "He's the Man!"

In 1932, many of Brinkley's personal messages came from an innovative, attention-getting, carefully crafted Chevrolet sound truck with AMMUNITION TRAIN NO. 1 painted in large letters on its panels. Complete with a microphone and platform that could be adjusted into position, AMMUNITION TRAIN NO. 1 announced its approach with a blast from its five-mile horn. Again, Brinkley traveled in an ostentatious Cadillac. Again, a Methodist minister opened the rallies with a prayer. Again, Roy Faulkner cast his spell with "The

37. Publicity, November 20, 1930; Lydia S. Bishop, Norton, to author, October 6, 1989.

Strawberry Roan” and often added a hymn or two.39

Brinkley’s 1932 platform—drawn up and revised by Dewey, who again had analyzed suggestions from thousands of letters—differed somewhat from that of 1930. It included a state income tax if the people approved; vastly cheaper car license tags; consolidation of schools; a renewed call for free textbooks; ratification of the federal child labor amendment; investigation of the state highway commission; physical fitness tests yearly for physicians, plus a five-year examination of their qualifications and skills; assisted by state aid, a “colored” hospital that would be used to train “colored” nurses and doctors; continued opposition to the discriminatory Basic Science Law; and support for various programs Brinkley’s constituency had requested.40

During the campaign, the doctor was often belittled about his goat gland operations and the mental qualities of his followers. But he gave better than he received. Brinkley once told an audience that it would be far better to turn Kansas into a goat farm than a skunk farm. He silenced a heckler who kept interrupting with the “b-a-a-a!” of a billy goat by saying, “A little louder, please! I might be able to use you.”41

William Allen White again waded into the fray with stinging editorials like “Save Kansas!”—save Kansas from the shame of being belittled as the home of the demagogic Brinkley and his platform. “Save Kansas!” ranks with White’s 1896 polemic, “What’s the Matter with Kansas?”, an assault on Populists that brought the Emporian national attention. In 1932, White asserted the Brinkleyites were morons and riffraff. Brinkley countered by greeting his next gathering with “Fellow morons and riffraff!” They howled with derisive laughter. White, Brinkley snapped, should quit worrying about the cost of schoolbooks and start worrying about the needs of the poor.42

Scarcely noticed in the 1932 Brinkley campaign were blessings sent by the Rev. Dr. Gerald B. Winrod. Brinkley’s reported associations with Winrod, William Dudley “Silver Shirts” Pelley, and others who have been designated as American nativists...
or fascists remains to be assessed as part of Brinkley's turbulent post-Kansas career. Despite his championing the oppressed and his philanthropies, Brinkley is not to be whitewashed. But it is to be remembered that he became an outspoken radio pacifist in the late 1930s during a time of approaching war, a time when pacifists came to be monitored and severely frowned upon by the Roosevelt administration and its interventionist adherents.

In 1932, Governor Woodring, who like Brinkley had a good speaking voice, accused the doctor and the *Wichita Beacon* of receiving sizeable campaign "slush funds" from Henry L. Doherty, the aggressive president of the Cities Service gas and oil empire and publisher of the *Kansas City Journal*. The *Wichita Eagle* ran facsimiles of some of the checks, the first numbered "62." In addition to "62," allegedly ten more were drawn from a special bank account "number J-329" for use by Doherty operatives in their efforts to defeat Woodring. Earlier, Woodring had started action against Cities Service in an attempt to lower natural gas rates. He also believed Cities Service in some cases had cheated well owners by devices that largely bypassed meters and registered a trickle of gas flow from wells to the main lines.44

Electioneering in Hill City, Brinkley termed the "slush fund" charges "the wildest Jackass story I ever heard." Woodring stated he intended to present the evidence of wrong-doing to the federal district attorney, but apparently nothing came of this. At least Woodring's promise to call in the federal district attorney does not appear in contemporary news accounts.44

Alf Landon, the politically astute Republican gubernatorial

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nominee whose campaign was ably managed by Frank Carlson of Concordia, decided to let Brinkley and Woodring kill off one another. Most useful to Landon's campaign was the waspish Pink Rag, published by Charles Trapp of Topeka. This cartoon-filled scandal sheet heckled Brinkley without mercy or let up. On one occasion, Trapp dared Brinkley to bring suit if he did not like the Pink Rag's saucy potshots.

Landon's group had correctly set his opponents at each other's throats, and the overall strategy was successful. Landon won in 1932 with 278,581 votes to Woodring's 272,944, and Brinkley's 244,607. With his name on the ballot, the doctor had drawn more votes than he had in 1930, but again he and his crusaders had fallen short of victory. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., asserted that if Dr. Brinkley had not entered the 1932 race, Woodring would have returned as governor. Schlesinger credits the "Goat Glands" doctor with taking "enough votes away from Woodring to give Landon the election."

In the months following the 1932 defeat, Dr. Brinkley continued to build up his medical and radio interests at Del Rio and Villa Acuna. But in 1934, Brinkley, still a citizen of Kansas even though he lived in Texas, returned to enter the Republican primary against Governor Landon. He did so against the wishes of Mrs. Brinkley and the advice of H. G. Hotchkiss.

Despite endeavors by James W. Dennis, Salina Democrat and typewriter dealer, and Dan D. Casement, well-known Manhattan area cattleman and conservative Republican, to prevent Brinkley's running, a ruling by the Kansas Election Board allowed his candidacy to stand. Why did Dr. Brinkley run in 1934 as a Republican? Mentioned has been his craving for notability and self-esteem. In addition, he was no quitter. A little reasoning by Brinkley should have made plain that his platforms of 1930 and 1932 had been more attuned to wide-ranging Rooseveltian New Deal programs ongoing in 1934, than to Landon's cautious but positive approach.


Brinkley, however, undoubtedly realized that the Democratic primary already was congested with six contestants—Omar B. Ketchum, Thurman Hill, George E. Rogers, Charles E. Miller, Kirk Prather, and Walter Eggers. And, as one longtime Brinkley observer suggested, perhaps he thought it possible to "beard the lion [Landon] in his own den." 49

Brinkley evidently knew or cared little about Landon's accomplishments. Before becoming governor, he had led the fight against major oil companies that saved "stripper" (low production) wells from closure and extinction. As governor, he had pushed through a state conservancy and pipeline control law. Under Interior Secretary Ickes' aegis, he had helped draw up the National Recovery Administration oil code, establishing a prorata system, a fair market price for crude, and forbidding interstate shipment of "hot oil," oil produced beyond assigned quotas. For Kansas during the early New Deal, Landon had secured federally funded dams and waterways, obtained a Civilian Conservation Corps camp, and urged aid to education. He welcomed Agricultural Adjustment Administration attempts through domestic allotment payments to hold down production and increase farm income. He aided drought-stricken cattle counties by obtaining lower freight rates on incoming feed and outgoing breeding stock. He had plans to use oil line pipes to carry water to parched herds. Beyond this, under Landon, Kansas' costs for administering New Deal relief were perhaps the lowest of any state. Landon handled his state's difficulties fairly and with dispatch, receiving national attention as a governor and budget-balancer. 50

In 1934, Brinkley ignored Landon's record and lashed out with a whirlwind radio campaign. He tried to make an issue of the state bond scandal that had surfaced in Landon's administration. The Wichita Eagle reported that Brinkley's intended radio remarks about this fraud had been censored. 51 He would have sought to capitalize on a reported $10,000 check to Mrs. Landon from Ronald Finney, the thoroughly corrupt Emporia con-

49. Mildred Wilson, Milford, memorandum to author, 1960.
51. Wichita Eagle, August 4, 1934.
confidence man. The payment, it turned out, was in settlement of a straight business loan, in no way associated with the bond mess. Even had Brinkley made the bond scandal a point of attack, most Kansas voters realized that an outraged Landon had ruthlessly "chopped heads" of state officials involved in the scandal. 52

So far as winning the Republican primary went, Brinkley had misread political road signs and taken a wrong turn. He received only 50,903 votes to Landon's 233,956. 53 At that, Brinkley doubtless valued the attention and briefly recaptured the thrill of campaigning. But his miserable showing effectively ended any resurrection of political Brinkleyism in Kansas. Brinkleyism had been dead since the 1932 election.

Brinkley himself toyed with a presidential race in 1936 and briefly considered an independent candidacy for governor of Texas in 1938, but he decided not to challenge W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel. Nor did he follow through with a contemplated race for the United States Senate in 1940 following the death of Morris Sheppard. 54

How far did Brinkley wish to lead? Had he turned to politics solely to get even? No doubt that was a factor. He might have hoped for the restoration of his medical license. Admittedly, he had been dealt a rough hand, and he had become emotionally disturbed, possibly developing paranoid tendencies as Dr. Fishbein once suggested. 55

Even though he never became governor of Kansas, for a few years Brinkley had led a supportable movement, in some ways akin to Populism. The Populist platform had been drawn up by an organized party; the Brinkley platform had been drawn up from suggestions mailed in by his followers. Like Populism, however, Brinkleyism appealed to the bereft and the downtrodden, and offered measures aimed at specific goals. Brinkley's major platform weaknesses were his lack of relief programs for agriculture and the unemployed. Understandably, the wealthy doctor did not favor a progressive state income tax but went along with his followers' wishes. Had many of his other proposals been imple-
In 1931, the anti-corporation farming law was passed and, with several modifications, remain on the books. The Basic Science Law that restricted osteopaths and chiropractors was amended in 1949, and they also benefited from the passage of the Healing Arts Act of 1957. For decades Kansas has benefited from thousands of miles of paved roads. (Not only Brinkley but party politicians of his day had called for improved roads.) During the Eisenhower years, I-70, the nation’s first interstate highway, opened just west of Topeka at Maple Hill. Within months, other portions were completed south of Milford between Junction City and Abilene. The doctor would have been delighted.

Obviously, a reliable increase of rainfall, resulting from artificial water catchments, as envisaged by Brinkley has not occurred. During the 1930s, however, numerous state lakes were built, first by the Civil Works Administration and later by the Works Progress Administration. Since World War II, a score of giant reservoirs and lakes have been constructed. Dr. Brinkley might have experienced both sorrow and satisfaction at the waters covering old Milford. He had put the town on the map only to partly dismantle it at the time of his final Del Rio move in 1933. He did not want competitors taking over his facilities. At the same time, he would have been overwhelmed had he lived to see vast Milford Lake—with its huge storage capacity and gigantic dam stretching over a mile—built and administered by the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

It is difficult for the political and social historian to evaluate technical medical procedures, but

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58. Leonard W. Schruben, Manhattan, memorandum to author, October 1990, on changes in the anti-corporation farming law; Clifford R. Hope, Jr., Garden City, to author, October 29, 1990, enclosed copy of state laws governing such farming practices into 1998; Kansas Statutes Annotated, 17-5902-5904, p. 399-400.
judgments in the case of Dr. J. R. Brinkley, surgeon and physician, are necessary. Although the birth of William "Billy" Stittsworth, the first goat gland baby, offers empirical evidence, scientists and surgeons have steadfastly denied the worth of Brinkley's goat gland implants. In 1936, Dr. David Hamilton, while championing the pioneering but ineffective work of Serge Voronoff, scored Brinkley as a "quack," discredited Steinach, and hailed Fishbein's triumph over Brinkley in the 1938 lawsuit. Scientists, surgeons, politicians, and historians have labeled Brinkley a quack.61

Quackery aside, there are those who believe a placebo may set off beneficial reactions. This could have applied to Brinkley's transplants. Many patients proclaimed he had relieved their impotency and reinvigorated them. To be sure, their relief might have been psychosomatic. His later surgeries have been compared with vasectomies, which Fishbein in 1935 credited with an occasional but temporary restoration of sexual vitality.62 In recent years medical centers have advertised relief from male impotency. Brinkley would have been at ease with these modern methods. In addition, modern medicine has utilized animal transplants for human patients. In 1956, Dr. Jack D. Walker of the University of Kansas College of Health Science decried Brinkley's medical practices but concluded that the Wizard of Milford "was a genius—a blatant, egocentric, showman. No one can deny that he possessed a fair amount of basic medical knowledge. If he had chosen to apply his abilities toward legitimate fields of endeavor, he might have made a notable contribution to the field of medicine. As it is, medical history remembers him only to condemn him."63 In 1978, however, Mrs. Brinkley quietly averred that the doctor was simply ahead of his time.

No matter what views about gland transplant rejuvenation prevail, history should not forgo judgment on Brinkleyism, the political movement, a movement Dr. Brinkley led and could have continued to lead had he chosen. The New Deal, Fair Deal, and

61. Hamilton, Men's Gland Affair, 143, passim; Clifford R. Hope, Sr., "Kansas in the 1930's," Kansas Historical Quarterly 36 (Spring 1970): 9, assailed Brinkley as "a crook and a scoundrel of the first order."


Modern Republicanism have sought to improve life somewhat in the spirit of Brinkleyism, Townsendism, Sinclairism, Longism, elements of Technocracy, and other isms that seemed so rash in the 1930s.

Brinkleyism, had it developed a sound economic foundation and a state and county party organization, might have become an ongoing political vehicle. Albeit a movement built around a single man, Brinkleyism was serious and deserves to be treated as such. Despite the alarmists of its day and the carping judgments by historians, Brinkleyism was more than wild-eyed radicalism. Regardless of his clouded early years, shaky medical education, high-flying but turbulent Milford era, pioneering use of super-powered radio for advertisement and entertainment, grandiose Del Rio life-style, and move to Little Rock in 1938, followed by bankruptcy in late January 1941, Dr. John R. Brinkley had the support of thousands. Today, wherever "Brinkleyites" remain, voices speak out for the scintillating Wizard of Milford.  

64. Interviews with former "Brinkleyites," Milford, July 12, 1940.