



# The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley

*R. Alton Lee*

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## **The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley** R. Alton Lee

Tells the story of the infamous "Goat Gland Doctor"—controversial medical charlatan, groundbreaking radio impresario, and prescient political campaigner—and recounts his amazing rags to riches to rags career. A popular joke of the 1920s posed the question, "What's the fastest thing on four legs?" The punch line? "A goat passing Dr. Brinkley's hospital!"

It seems that John R. Brinkley's virility rejuvenation cure—transplanting goat gonads into aging men—had taken the nation by storm. Never mind that "Doc" Brinkley's medical credentials were shaky at best and that he prescribed medication over the airwaves via his high-power radio stations. The man built an empire. The Kansas Medical Board combined with the Federal Radio Commission to revoke Brinkley's medical and radio licenses, which various courts upheld. Not to be stopped, Brinkley started a write-in campaign for Governor. He received more votes than any other candidate but lost due to invalidated and "misplaced" ballots.

Brinkley's tactics, particularly the use of his radio station and personal airplane, changed political campaigning forever. Brinkley then moved his radio medical practice to Del Rio, Texas, and began operating a "border blaster" on the Mexico side of the Rio Grande. His rogue stations, XER and its successor XERA, eventually broadcast at an antenna-shattering 1,000,000 watts and were not only a haven for Brinkley's lucrative quackery, but also hosted an unprecedented number of then-unknown country musicians and other guests.

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