Jerry McKelvy's
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THE NIGHT THE STARS FELL

It has been called the greatest astronomical spectacle in recorded history. It happened November 10, 1833, starting about two o'clock in the morning and lasted until daylight. Thousands of stars fell to the earth lighting up the skies and being so bright people were awakened from their sleep. The falling stars were seen for three consecutive nights.

It was not like an ordinary falling star people occasionally see. This show was so intense that many people thought the world was ending and fell to their knees confessing their sins and praying that God would have mercy on them. One witness said it was like watching showers of fiery rain falling to the ground. A man in Natchez, Mississippi was awakened from sleep and thought the city was on fire. It was estimated that 10,000 meteors per hour fell to the earth. This very intense meteor shower was seen over much of North America. Meteors were not well understood at that time and many people remembered the Bible verses in Matthew 24: 29-31:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds.

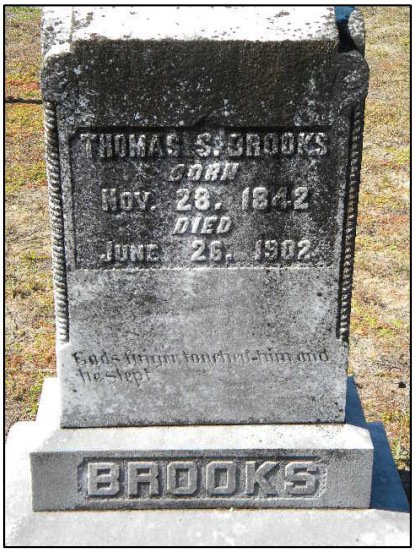
And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

It was without a doubt the greatest fireworks show man has ever seen and from reading the stories of those who witnessed it, we can easily understand how frightened the people were. When things returned to normal, the event became known as "the night the stars fell".

Ebenezer Cemetery in Nevada County is the final resting place for many in my family. The cemetery dates back to before the Civil War days when the area was first settled. I have collected information on the people buried in this cemetery over the years. Many of the graves have no marker except for a rock or a piece of petrified wood and some have no markers at all. Most of the family names are familiar to me since I grew up in the area, but a few names are somewhat puzzling such as several graves with the surname BROOKS. I had never heard of anyone living in the area named Brooks and could find no information about them. All I had was the grave markers with their names and dates.

Through the miracle of the Internet, we are now able to communicate easily with people in far-

off places and share information. A few weeks ago, I was contacted by a lady who had come across *The Sandyland Chronicle* on the Internet. She had read a story about the Tunnell family who once lived in the area around Ebenezer and had made a connection between the Brooks family and the Tunnell family. I put her in touch with some of the Tunnell family descendants and soon we learned more about the Brooks family buried at Ebenezer, especially Elizabeth Brooks and her husband, Thomas S. Brooks whose stones are pictured here.



Debbie Delgado, a descendant of this couple, mentioned that her grandmother, Ila Brooks Watkins, had written a true story about Elizabeth and Thomas Brooks that was told to her when she was a child. I thought you might enjoy the story and Debbie has graciously agreed to share it. Mrs. Ila Brooks Watkins lived in Douglas, Texas. She contributed this story for a project done by the Douglas High School many years ago in which students went out into the community and interviewed older people and published their stories in a magazine called *Chinaquapin—A Folklore and History Magazine*.

The story of Elizabeth and Thomas Brooks is a love story set in the Civil War days. Thomas was a Union soldier who met and fell in love with Elizabeth, a Southern girl, during the Civil War. Thanks to Debbie for sharing this story with us and helping to solve the mystery of the Brookses buried at Ebenezer Cemetery. I will think of this story now when I walk by the grave markers of Thomas and Elizabeth Brooks.

GOLDEN MEMORIES
A true story written by Ida Lee Brooks Watkins

"My father was almost 21 years of age when grandmother insisted on moving back south, and my grandfather, Thomas Brooks, moved near Prescott, Arkansas, and homesteaded a large amount of land. (You) could do that in those days—build a rail fence around it and go to paying

taxes, get a deed, and it was yours. My grandparents on my mother's side were Paton and Tennie Tunnell, and they lived just across the river from the Brookses. Soon, my father, Edwin Brooks, met Laura Tunnell, my sweet mother. They got married. In just over a year, I was born, and then later, my brother Arthur, and then the baby boy Garland Paton Brooks.

"When I was a child, my grandmother Brooks told me this story that has become a golden memory to me, and it has remained with me to this day. I want to share this memory with you."

Pictured here are Edd Brooks, his mother, Bettie Elizabeth Amos Brooks, and Lewis Brooks. Elizabeth and Lewis from Arkansas were visiting Edd and his family at Wildhurst in Cherokee County, Texas.

The following story was told by Elizabeth Brooks to her granddaughter, Ila Lee Brooks Watkins, when she was a child.

Elizabeth Brooks and her husband, Thomas S. Brooks are buried at Ebenezer Cemetery in Nevada County.

"Seated around an open fireplace in a little farmhouse near Little Rock, Arkansas, my grandmother told how they spun thread and made cloth by the use of a loom. All the clothing for the family was done by hand with a needle and thread.

"They owned in those days a very large number of colored people. Everyone knew his duty in the house and also in the field. My grandmother told us how they were working in the fields when 'the stars fell'. One colored man was so excited when they all ran to the house with the news that he found he had knocked off his big toe.

"They certainly thought the world was coming to an end. It was a fear-filled night. Earlier in the afternoon, the colored man's foot was treated, and the war was ended before he was able to be on his foot again.

"One day when my grandmother was strolling down the road with her sister, all of a sudden, thieves jumped from behind a large tree. The thieves had drifted there from other places and camped near my grandmother's farm. Grandmother said they ran faster than lightning, back to the house.

"The farmhouse in which they lived was built of logs, chimneys were made of old dirt or rock, and boards to cover the houses were made by hand. They had an open fireplace where the cooking was done. My grandmother did not cook as there were two colored women to take care of all that.

"That wasn't the last heard of the thieves. That night the thieves came to the farmhouse and stole all the bacon, sausage, and lard that had been put away in the smokehouse. Well, my grandmother's stepmother did a brave thing. She went to the thieves the next morning with tears in her eyes as she told them the food they had taken was all that her husband had left them while he was away at war. They did return part of the bacon—but in a rude way; they threw it under the house in the dirt, and it took all the hands and cooks to wash it and put it back in the smokehouse again.

"It wasn't too long before my great-great grandfather became very ill while at war and he was allowed to come home alone on horseback. Thieves way-laid him near his homestead, killed him, and took his horse, his shoes, and overcoat, leaving his bare body in the road. The desperate thieves came on to the farmhouse and searched through everything, taking all they wanted. They left only an overcoat of checked material which was hanging on the wall. The overcoat was used to bury him in. The servants took old hewn planks from the ceiling of the house to make a casket and laid him to rest. With troubles such as this, the old colored man working at the homestead gave him a decent burial.

"Not long after this sad day, the women were out under the tall shade trees in the yard weaving cloth. Hearing a noise, they looked up to see an army of Northern soldiers dressed in blue. Scared pink and afraid to run, as there was no place to go, they fearfully awaited their arrival. The soldiers were nice to them and asked if they might camp near their house so that they could use water from the spring. So the Yankees remained on; my future grandfather was in "that army". Grandmother said he was the "cutest Yankee" she had ever seen. My grandmother Elizabeth was 13 when she met her future husband. The servants had started to the spring for water. Elizabeth and her sister, Mary, asked if they might go along just for a stroll. When they arrived at the spring, some of the Yankees were there. The very one that Elizabeth had thought was so cute when she had seen him before was at the spring. He was Thomas Brooks from Springfield, Illinois.

"The young gentleman asked Elizabeth if he might carry her small water pail back to the house, and of course, she was willing to accept his offer. On arriving at her house atop a high hill, Elizabeth invited him in. He also made a date to call by and to call on her when he could.

"Late one evening not long afterwards, Elizabeth recognized his voice calling her, and she invited him in. During his visit, he took her slate from the bookshelf and wrote: 'I love you, Elizabeth' as they sat by the candlelight. She smiled and felt herself in love with him also.

"Thomas came to see her as often as he could, but soon the Yankees received orders to move out. The night before his army marched off to battle, the old colored woman who had cared for Elizabeth all her life, prepared a nice dinner for her and her boyfriend. It was on this night that

Thomas asked Elizabeth to be his wife. As she was only 13 and going to school, marriage was unthinkable. (School was only held three months out of each year).

"The Yankees marched on, and Elizabeth was very lonely, thinking that she would never see or hear of Thomas again. School soon started, and she tried to keep busy.

"Elizabeth described the school as a 'one-teacher school', a crude log building held together with pegs as there were no nails to be had then. Nor were there any desks, only the rough benches. She had to walk about four miles to school each day, sometimes in sleet, snow, or rain. Children had to be well-clothed for the weather in those days—long knit stockings, mittens, and shawls especially for the girls.

"Elizabeth told of a school boy who leaned back against the wall of the school and went to sleep. Well, his hair was just a bit long, and the teacher pounded on the stand, and the boy awoke, but he found that his hair was stuck in the pine resin which had oozed from the logs and hardened. Elizabeth tried to keep her mind on her schooling, not altogether successfully, but did try to get all the education an orphan girl could in those days.

"One afternoon on the way home from school, she was frightened by a wild bull. Elizabeth would jump behind bushes along the path, and the bull would tear them up right behind her. It was a close call for Elizabeth, but she managed to outrun the bull and arrive home safely, but scared. From then on, some of the servants went with her to school in case other wild animals besides the bulls, such as panthers or bears, tried to attack her.

"One day when Elizabeth and her sister, Mary, were down at the spring with the black mothers watching them wash, the scream of a panther cut the air. They quickly gathered up the clothing and run up the hill to the house, which was half a mile away. They threw down some of the garments when the panther sounded so near, and then it would stop screaming for a while. The men at the house heard the panther though, and they began to load their guns (which took thirty minutes) and soon came to the rescue, killing the panther.

"The war was coming to an end, and Elizabeth still had hopes of hearing some day from her Yank. Thomas was at his home in Illinois, working hard and looking forward to coming back South to see the only girl who had won his heart and to see if she would only say 'yes'.

"As the war ended, the old colored folks were free to go if they wished. Only one left Elizabeth, her sister, and stepmother. He left to marry a woman in another town. The family had always been good to their servants, and the servants had no desire to leave them.

"The girls were grown up now, and they had begun to think about being taught to cook and keep house. Elizabeth soon became quite expert at baking decorated cakes and at just about anything. She was more anxious every day to learn how to do all the housework as she had never done it before.

"Elizabeth began to make all of her clothes, knit, and make lace, stockings, and even straw shuck

hats. She braided the shucks and sewed them together to fit her head and made a brim as wide as she wished. They wore wide skirts in those days; they also wore four or five petticoats, bustles, and hoop skirts. A stylish hair-do in those days was to wear 'bangs'.

Elizabeth and her sister, Mary, along with several others, got ready to attend church one particular Easter. They rode in an ox wagon to the church some five miles away. Elizabeth felt very dressed up on that Easter morn. The wagon rolled up and all were getting seated. It was her first time to wear a hoop skirt and she sat down on it the wrong way, and it flew up, almost toppling her over. She remembered to be very careful when she sat down the next time.

"They were all decked out in Easter garb and shuck straw hats and it started to rain before they arrived at the church. Their hats were a little floppy and wilted, and the carefully pressed frocks were now damp. Luckily, the sun began to shine forth and helped to dry them out a bit before they got to the church.

"All had fun on the last day of school, and Elizabeth's boyfriend, with whom she had been going for a long time, seemed to be more interested in her, but she still had hopes of hearing from her "Yankee Boy', as she called him. She had her heart set on him and no one else. On a Monday morning, an old colored man went to the small place about then miles away to get the mail. (Mail came only once a week). When he returned, he brought the letter for which Elizabeth had waited so long—a letter from her 'Yankee beau'.

"How happy she was to know that Thomas was alive and that he still had his heart set on her being his wife. Elizabeth's sister, Mary, was soon to be married also. Her boyfriend had returned from the war, and he was visiting her often. Mary would tell Elizabeth every day, 'You don't want to marry that boy so far away. You don't know his family or maybe him as well as you think'. But Elizabeth could not love anyone else, so she answered his letter. She made the trip to the station and got her message mailed. She related to him that she would let him know when to come for her.

"The war was over, the wedding day of Mary, Elizabeth's sister, was set, and they had a great wedding. They began cooking two days before and all the folks came from miles around for the wedding.

"Edward Sorrells came from several hundred miles away in a covered wagon, the best method of traveling in those days. Mary was dressed in a fancy wedding gown with bustles and bows, with her hair piled high on her head, and she wore high top shoes. Mary and Edward Sorrells were married in the afternoon, and a square dance followed the ceremony. A little string band played, using home-made fiddles and other instruments.

"Elizabeth could not enjoy herself as she was thinking of having to leave with her sister and Edward without her Yankee beau knowing where she had gone. But the estate had been sold. The girls were heirs, but they stayed by their stepmother and abided by her decision to sell.

"Before Mary's wedding, Elizabeth and her stepmother were so scared of thieves stealing their

gold money that they buried it in an iron pot under the house. It was safe while they lived there, and they dug it up before leaving the homestead. All the time Elizabeth was worrying about her lover—he was building a home for her—but this she didn't know. She had no way to let him know where they were moving.

"The morning on which they were to leave the old home where Elizabeth had spent her life was a beautiful autumn one. Those childhood days romping and playing came fresh in her memory. She could not help but cry. The old colored people who had cared for her were just as sad, for they had to find another place to live. The first thing Elizabeth did was to go under the old house and dig up the pot of gold money.

"Elizabeth rushed in the house afraid that the thieves would slip up and get all their money. She pulled out a handful of the gold coins and gave them to her old colored mothers, and then began to pack coins away in different containers, so if they were attacked by thieves, maybe they would not get it all.

"Edward, her brother-in-law, got the oxen to the wagon, and it rolled up near the house so that they could load on the bedding and camping outfit. The food had been prepared for several days since they would have only campfire cooking on the journey. Edward was taking his bride, Mary, to Mississippi where he lived. Elizabeth and her stepmother slept in the wagon many nights as there was no other place to sleep. Elizabeth was tired, weary, and heartbroken. She just knew that she would never see her Yankee boy again.

"They traveled on, doing well if they traveled ten miles per day. One night they stopped near a large stream of water, and while there, a mad dog bit one of the oxen. This delayed them a few days as another ox had to be secured before they could continue on the journey. The dog and the ox were killed, and soon they were on their way again. Elizabeth had no telephone, radio, or TV and could not even send a letter to her beau to let him know she had gone away. Some of the people the group met as they traveled thought that they were Gypsy fortune tellers, and Elizabeth only related to them that she wished she was. Maybe then she would know about her future.

"They traveled on very slowly in the ox wagon, stopping when they had an opportunity at night to stay at some family home or in town at a place which could be compared to our modern motels. Instead of garages for cars, there were nice stalls and stables in which oxen and horses could be cared for. During the stop, good home-baked food would be served; there were nice beds to rest on and then they would be ready for another ten miles' journey. Elizabeth was taking care of the gold coins, careful to display only a few at a time, for they were afraid of being robbed but no one ever thought of these folks having more gold than they knew what to do with.

"They stopped at one 'road side inn'. One night Elizabeth seemed to be uneasy about something and related to Mary, Edward, and her stepmother that she did not like the folk's attitude at the place. After they ate supper (it's called dinner now, you know) at the wagon, they were disturbed by some noise, and Elizabeth insisted they all sleep in the same room that night. Some would sleep while some stayed awake to watch and listen. They would leave the candle light burning all night. Believing that something was going wrong, Elizabeth was made wide awake.

She always prayed. Sure enough, before dawn, a voice called to them, 'Here is a better light; won't you accept it please?' She quickly replied that they didn't need any more light than they had, and those who were calling went away.

"The next morning as Edward went to the stable after the oxen and the wagon so that they could get away from that place, there were two men who were hidden in the stable with chloroform shawls to throw over his head to kill him or put him to sleep while they robbed him. They jumped at him with the shawls, but he jumped back and ran to the room where Elizabeth, Mary, and their stepmother were. They ran out of the room screaming, getting more roomers up and out of their rooms. Elizabeth and her daddy's old gun came out right along. After an hour or more, a number of the roomers went after the oxen with her brother-in-law. They were soon on their way again.

"They soon stopped for breakfast at another house. They told what had happened the night before while they were stopped, about how scared they were, and how Elizabeth had prayed. It was reported to officers, and this place where they had stayed turned out to be a place where people killed and robbed everyone they thought had money. The main building was a two-story building and in the dining room was a trap door underneath a fine carpet. The trap door let down and a person could fall into a pit underneath the house where killers would kill a person and steal his money. This was an awful place. The thieves had received what was coming to them, but she was thankful to God that they were saved from being killed that night.

"Thomas Brooks, Elizabeth's lover, was not far behind them.

"It was a very cold day in November with the autumn leaves falling and snow on the ground. The four had traveled since September in the ox wagon and were tired and worn from the long, weary journey.

"When it got too cold, they would stop and heat the large rocks which they carried in rags to keep their feet warm as nowadays we used heating pads.

"Elizabeth began to let her mind reflect back to the only one she ever loved and prayed that she would soon see him again. How she could picture in her mind what a lovely little house they might someday have in the north—her life to spend with Thomas Brooks, if they ever met again!

"When the morning came, they were to cross the Mississippi River on a ferry boat. Now, this was almost more than Elizabeth could undertake. The oxen rolled the wagon on the old flat platform. They pulled chains to steer across to the other side where the chains were fastened to a large structure. It was an exciting event for all of them.

"They were all holding their breath and were so frightened! Elizabeth could picture the contents of her future home in the water. When they were almost across, the old oxen began to get restless and lunged back and forth. About the time they were to land, off went the oxen into the shallow water. Oh, Elizabeth prayed aloud, and the wagon bed began to float out into deep water. She related that they were getting all wet and were about to sink when men in boats came

to get them. They rescued everything.

"Elizabeth was as wet as a duck with her box of gold held closely, and with her sweet dimpled cheeks, she had a smile for everyone—in spite of being scared to death. She was chatting with the boatman when they heard a loud voice calling for the raft to be brought back to the other side. Elizabeth thought she recognized the voice. The man had to wait several hours before a raft could be taken because of some trouble.

"Elizabeth, her stepmother, Mary, and Edward were all wet and went to a camp house nearby to change clothes. They needed food and coffee to warm them up. Elizabeth seemed very cheerful as she thought she recognized the voice she had heard from the other side of the river.

"It was Thomas, Elizabeth's fiancé. He was so happy to learn that he had at last found her. Elizabeth finished eating and ran to put on her best dress which was tucked away in her fine luggage in the home-made wooden box. She fixed her hair high on her head, powdered her face with starch tied up in a rag, and she put on her high top shoes. She strolled down where the boat was coming nearer and nearer.

"Thomas was holding his horse and waving to her at the same time. When she could tell for sure it was he, she felt as if she could swim the river. She was the happiest girl in the world.

"When he stepped on land, she was in his arms, and they lost no time in heading on their way to get a marriage license.

"They all had to stay where they were as the ox wagon was broken from the fall in the river. It had been a long weary trip, but Thomas had finally overtaken the ox wagon and now had Elizabeth as his own."

THE STORY OF ELIZABETH AND THOMAS WILL CONTINUE IN NEXT ISSUE

John R. Brinkley – Millionaire, Mountebank, Medicine Man
by Don Mathis

My dad used to tell me stories about a doctor in the Great Depression who would broadcast his services on the radio. Folks from the Rockies to the Appalachians could pick up his advertisements for live baby chicks – and for goat glands. Thousands of men were swayed by the idea that a gonad graft would improve sexual performance.

Years later, I listened to the song by ZZ Top, "Heard it on the X." Their tune was about XER, the radio transmitter in Acuña, Mexico, that used to broadcast early rock from disc jockeys like Wolfman Jack and others. The beat of rock and roll could be said to improve sexual performance as well.

Then I learned of the connection between the powerful radio station that pushed airwaves from Arkansas to Alberta in the 1930s and laid the Big Beat across America in the 1960s. Laws in Mexico were more lenient than in the U.S in the early days of radio. More wattage could be broadcast. Less content was censored.

The Playhouse in San Antonio presents the world premier of "Roads Courageous" (February 22 – March 17), a musical about the implanter of goat glands and the implementer of electronic media manipulation. John R. Brinkley (born in 1885 in Jackson County, North Carolina, died in 1942 in San Antonio) may be an unusual subject for a song and dance or a comedy/drama, but he was an unusual man.

Dr. Brinkley took advantage of the nebulous distinctions in professional medicine and the advent of electronic technology in the early 20th century. He made his cash registers ring. At a time when distrust in big government was at its highest and faith in corporate power was at its lowest, disapproval from the American Medical Association only strengthened his appeal.

Two reasons the AMA (or, the Amateur Meat-cutter's Association, as he liked to call them) considered Dr. Brinkley a quack was for his propensity to prescribe pills over the radio and his collection of kickbacks from participating pharmacies. He had a showmanship that stretched the boundaries of professional decorum. And then there was that goat gland business.

Dr. Brinkley was an astute observer of the human psyche and he knew what people wanted to hear. He perfected the art of stroking the ego of men who had been kicked to the curb by the Great Depression. He offered better health, more energy, and increased libido. His sheer enthusiasm and promises for a better life may have helped many with a placebo effect.

But he did so much more than promote sexual vitality. Dr. Brinkley owned one of the first commercial radio stations in the country. KFKB in Milford, Kansas, broadcast regional weather reports and news of Chicago stocks – and farmers and ranchers turned in. The careers of Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, and Hank Williams were also enhanced from Dr. Brinkley's broadcasts. The doctor even offered college courses over the air. Listeners could get a degree from the Kansas State Agricultural College which was every bit as valid as Dr. Brinkley's own credentials.

When State authorities finally revoked Dr. Brinkley's medical and broadcasting licenses, he ran for governor of Kansas in an effort to restore them. He pioneered the use of radio and aviation to further his political ends. Dr. Brinkley championed a message of the common man. He rejected elitism and embraced rustic values. His political rallies were a mixture of religious revival with a touch of state fair flamboyance. The crowds were huge.

We see a lot of the same attractions in today's political and health-care fields. Some candidates take pride in covert racism and anti-intellectualism. And who hasn't seen the draw for 'alternative health' zealots? A campaign for education reform, assistance to the elderly, a fair tax system, and free health care still holds appeal to a lot of voters.

Although he gathered 240,000 votes, Dr. Brinkley failed in his 1932 election attempt and his attempt to maintain his accreditation in Kansas. By the mid-30s, he was broadcasting again, this time from the powerful XER in Acuña and running a very successful hospital on this side of the river in Del Rio, Texas.

Armed with an assortment of eclectic degrees and foreign diplomas from a variety of quasi-medical schools, he attained a level of authenticity. The cost of his goat gland operation increased from $750 to $1,500. The signal from his radio station reached all 48 states with enough power left over (as the *Chicago Daily News* reported) "to light the street lights in Calgary." Whether or not South Texas ranchers could listen to XER on their barbwire fence or screen door, on a clear night the signal could be received in Europe and China.

Times were good. About 4,000 patients a year visited his facility in Del Rio for dysfunction. More visited his hospital for rectal diseases in San Juan, Texas. Dr. Brinkley's goat farm in Oklahoma was doing extremely well. He bought 6,500 acres in North Carolina, a ranch in Texas and opened up two more hospitals in Little Rock, Arkansas. At one time he owned three yachts, a Lockheed Electra airplane, and a dozen Cadillac cars.

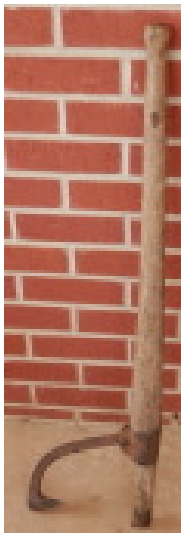
It all came crashing down rather quickly. He claimed he was libeled by the editor of an AMA publication but the jury decided in 1939 he had been accurately identified as a charlatan. A 'cut-rate' competitor appeared in Del Rio, siphoning off his customers, some right from his waiting room. Dr. Brinkley filed for bankruptcy after getting hit with several malpractice suits and a government claim for $200,000 in back taxes.

Then, in 1941, Mexico had to reallocate the wavelength assigned to his radio and the voice of the people's physician was silenced forever. The next year, on a spring day in San Antonio, Dr. Brinkley died from heart disease and complications of a leg amputation brought on by a blood clot.

His mansion in Del Rio still stands. Where he lived in San Antonio is a mystery. But for a generation, Dr. Brinkley riveted the imagination with the symbolism of the billy goat and the prowess of Pan.

XXX

(Don Mathis of San Antonio is the son of Bernadine Walker Mathis Gillespie, born 1925 in Bluff City, and Daniel Hearnsberger Mathis, born 1921 in Fordyce)



WHAT IS IT?

Do you know what this tool is used for or what it is called? Hint: The answer has two words with four letters each.

Send me your answer by April 15th.

Comments about the last issue:

---About the case knife…….my parents always called them case knives and I wonder if it is because they were made by the Case company? Don has some Case pocket knives.
---About the picture with the hat in front of the students…do you suppose one of the students had died and that was their way of showing respect for him? Just a thought. (Yvonne Munn)

This is what Wikipedia says about case knives:

A **case knife** is a name used throughout the American South to refer to a table knife, i.e. a knife intended for use at the dining table. The origin of this usage comes from a time when inns did not customarily provide eating utensils with meals. The table fork was relatively new, and was often sold in combination with a knife and, sometimes, a spoon. Thus the term refers to a knife that was sold in a case, as part of a set of utensils intended for use in dining. Case knife is also used to refer to a pocketknife made by W. R. Case & Sons Cutlery Co.. (Susan Bell)

I think people once kept their best knives and other silverware in a nice case. This may be why they became known as case knives. (Billy Joe Meador)

Editor's note: Thanks for your comments. I had not thought about the hat in the picture might be for a student who had died. That is a possibility. Even today we sometimes see a soldier's helmet and boots in a photo to honor one who had been killed in the line of duty.

I did a little research of the case knives. I found that the W. R. Case & Sons Cutlery Co. was founded in 1883. They are most known for their high quality pocket knives, but they did make some knives for the kitchen like paring and slicing knives. What we call a case knife is properly called a table knife or a butter knife. I did not find any mention of W. R. Case Co. making these type knives. Also, I found case knives mentioned in old newspapers as far back as 1836—long before the W. R. Case Co. was started….. We once had a nice set of silverware that was kept in a nice case. I tend to think that may be why they became known as case knives, or the explanation from Wikipedia above may be correct.