

### ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY OCTOBER 15



Television newscaster David Brinkley at the dedication of the Brinkley Bridge at Wayne

**A new bridge near Wayne, built to replace the structure known as the Brinkley Bridge, was dedicated on October 15, 1971.**

**CSO: SS.8.7, SS.8.8, SS.8.14, SS.8.24, ELA.8.1**

**Investigate the Document: (Goldenseal Magazine Collection, Ar2055)**

1. The Brinkley Bridge, dedicated in David Brinkley's honor, connected a span of U.S. 52 between these two southwestern West Virginia communities.
2. David Brinkley, renowned television reporter for NBC, came to the bridge to document the poverty and poor road conditions facing West Virginians during the height of the 1960 election season. His exposé revealed the creaking floors of the Brinkley Bridge, that had been the ire of locals for many years. His report, although painfully true, was embarrassing for the state and angered Governor \_\_\_\_\_. His replacement \_\_\_\_\_ had the bridge re-floored and painted in 1961.
3. According to "A Rattle Heard 'Round the Nation," who were the two presidential candidates in 1960?
4. What happened on February 28, 1958 that parents said they feared when complaining about the safety of the bridge?

**Think Critically:** Brinkley's exposé undoubtedly played a role in public opinion and impacted state and national voting among West Virginians. How can media influence the outcome of elections?

# Local tribute made Brinkley miserable

By C. BOSWORTH JOHNSON

David Brinkley is leaving regular, scheduled television. Among all the tributes and biographies which now will honor him, I'm confident you'll never read about his closest contact with the Tri-State. It's even more certain the man himself will never mention it. So I will.

It happened in 1961. Brinkley was already an American institution when he sat alone in the far corner of my newsroom that weekend in 1961. He and Chet Huntley were the toast of broadcast journalism, the creators and sustainers of NBC's "Huntley Brinkley Report." But on this Saturday, David was angry, sullen, out of his element even within a newsroom. He had been conned by his network and by one of its substantial affiliates.

Brinkley was in Huntington to dedicate the Brinkley Bridge, a nondescript span on U.S. 52 between Huntington and Wayne. Covering the 1960 Kennedy-Humphrey Primary, Brinkley and a film crew had crossed the ancient bridge with a microphone dangling down from their vehicle to the wooden plank bridge floor. The resulting noisy film was shown to the nation that night, an illustration of poverty in West Virginia.

Republican Gov. Cecil Underwood was furious. Democrats, seeing political advantage in a campaign year, were delighted. When Democrat W.W. Barron replaced Underwood in 1961, the word went out: re-floor the old bridge, paint it, name it for Brinkley, and bring him here to dedicate it. NBC, urged by WSAZ-TV's influential president, L.H. "Bud" Rogers, told Brinkley to go.

Instead of a quick flight to Huntington, a brief ceremonial appearance at the bridge, and an equally quick departure, Brinkley found to his consternation that he was to be the centerpiece of an all-day festival. He was

scheduled to make half a dozen appearances, each complete with a speech, each in a politically inspired setting.

Brinkley, famous for crisp, pungent writing, retaliated by saying nothing — and saying it in precious few sentences — at each of the obligatory appearances. Each time, he said it was nice to be there, thank you so much. Then he would sit down. Furthermore, at every possible turn, he would escape from the entourage and hide out in the WSAZ newsroom.



**Brinkley**

That afternoon, in a largely deserted newsroom, there I was, one of his hosts, painfully aware of his discomfort. The conversation was desultory at best. I cannot recall a single quote, not even the subject of a single conversation. Oh, yes, there was one quote — an imprecation directed at one of his hosts. I have never repeated that one to anyone, and I won't. Otherwise, we talked little. He really wanted to disappear in a corner.

Later, I came to know Brinkley as a friendly man, truly a nice person. He is worlds away from the "Ted Knight" stereotype of the ego-driven anchor. But in 1961, hidden away inside WSAZ's Huntington newsroom, only one recollection stays with me. It is burned into my memory. There was the famous Brinkley, dour, slouched in a corner, seeking only to withdraw from an unkind world — and from the Brinkley Bridge.

The young news director felt so very sorry for the famous David Brinkley. Almost as sorry as Brinkley felt for himself.

C. Bosworth Johnson is former news director of WSAZ Newschannel 3.

Brinkley"  
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"A Rattle Heard 'Round the Nation:"

The Saga Of The Brinkley Bridge

By James E. Casto

Native sons and daughters who make good frequently are honored by the folks back home by having a street or avenue named after them. But West Virginia boasts a bridge named in honor of a popular television newsman who was born in North Carolina, has spent most of his professional career in Washington, and visited West Virginia only briefly.

How a Wayne County bridge came to be named for TV newsman David Brinkley is an intriguing footnote to West Virginia's historic 1960 presidential primary. At the heart of the bridge saga: a rattle that was heard around the nation.

West Virginia's 1960 primary was a magnet for journalists, dozens of whom flocked to the state to chronicle the epic clash between John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey. West Virginia proved to be the end of the line for the Humphrey campaign, and Kennedy's victory here helped give him the momentum he needed to win the Democratic nomination and, later, the White House.

Among the many newspeople who came to West Virginia to report on the hard-fought primary was David Brinkley, then the co-host of "The Huntley-Brinkley Report." The nightly NBC newscast featuring Brinkley and fellow newsman Chet Huntley was one of the nation's most-watched TV shows.

West Virginia's moment in the national political spotlight proved to be a dubious blessing, for many of the visiting

reporters focused on the state's problems. Brinkley was no exception. In April of 1960, while filming a pre-primary news report at an old, one-lane bridge on U.S. 52 just outside the corporate limits of Wayne, he had the inspired idea of holding his microphone down to the dilapidated bridge's creaky wooden floor. Viewers nationwide heard the old bridge's floorboards pop and groan as cars and trucks rumbled across it.

Brinkley's TV report lasted only two or three minutes but in that brief time he accomplished what many Wayne County residents had been struggling to accomplish for years - get the old bridge repaired.

Built in 1907, the bridge across Twelve Pole Creek long had been the subject of complaint.

In 1957, the bridge was given a posted weight limit of 5,000 pounds. Yet the next year it was still being traveled by a school bus carrying students to and from Ceredo Elementary and Ceredo-Kenova High School. Even empty, the bus weighed 8,000 pounds, far in excess of the posted limit.

On February 28, 1958, a loaded school bus plunged into the Big Sandy River near Prestonsburg, Kentucky, killing 26 children and the bus driver. Pointing to that tragedy, Wayne County parents said they feared a similar tragedy at the Twelve Pole bridge.

In response, the school bus driver began stopping at the bridge and unloading his students, who walked across the bridge. The driver then piloted the empty bus across the span and the

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This bridge has special significance. It represents a link to our past -- a bridge to our future. It is a fitting monument to a modern, prosperous West Virginia. Just as importantly, the New River Gorge Bridge is a tribute to the people who dreamed and have made that dream come true.

\* Addenda:

Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965

Introduced on January 6, 1965 by Senators Randolph and 36 other Members; Hearings: January 19 and 21.

Reported from Senate Public Works Committee on January 27, 1965

Passed Senate on February 1, 1965 by 62-22

Passed House on March 3, 1965 by 257 - 165

Became law on March 9

Extensions - 1967  
1969