Miss Gertrude Gabbert, Messrs. W.L. Stearman, Philip Williams, M.M. Murrell, Mont Gabbert, Ernest Shirley, Isaac Story, Tom Stephenson, J.T. Evans and Fred Rainwater represented the Lindsey Wilson at the Hodgenville celebration. The latter started on Thursday (sic) and made the trip there and back afoot. He is a perfect athlete, and is the fastest runner in the school. The day before starting to Hodgenville, he took a little exercise by running two miles. -- Transcribed from the "Personal" column published in the Wednesday, February 17, 1909 edition of the Adair County News.

The following was transcribed from the February 11, 1962 edition of the Louisville, Ky. Courier-Journal Magazine, pp. 17-19. (As a reference point, February 12 fell on Friday in 1909.)

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CAUGHT NAPPING IN LINCOLN'S BIRTHPLACE

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Last to Sleep in Cabin Before it Became a Shrine, Fred Rainwater Made a Bit of History Himself

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The young man poked the embers of the dying fire. It flared briefly in the stone fireplace, and lighted the bare interior of the crude log cabin.

The rain, which had been falling when he entered the cabin shortly after 3:30 a.m., gave the air a penetrating chill. He moved closer to the fire.

The monotonous sound of the rain on the wood shingle roof and the warmth of the fire caused the young man's eyes to grow heavy.

He stretched out on the only item of furniture, a wooden work bench, and his eyes closed. He must have slept for an hour or longer because the first faint traces of dawn was showing through the cabin door when he was awakened by the sound of voices.

"Looka there. That's old Abe himself," one voice was saying.

In such a manner was 21-year-old Fred Rainwater awakened on the morning of February 12, 1909, after having made a bit of history.

For the cabin in which he slept was the cabin in which, by tradition, Abraham Lincoln was born exactly 100 years earlier. Since later that day the cabin was enshrined inside a national historical park, it is entirely possible that Fred Rainwater was the last person ever to sleep -- if only briefly -- before the same fireplace which once warmed the 16th President.

How all this came about is told in the following article by Rainwater, now a resident of the Pulaski County community of Caines (sic) Store.

Hospitality helped Student on 50 mile walk to shrine-to-be

by Fred Rainwater

At the beginning of the year 1909, we students at the Lindsey Wilson Training School at Columbia read in The Courier-Journal that the Federal Government had taken over from the Collier Brothers the Lincoln farm in Larue County and was preparing to make of it a national shrine. A house of granite and marble was to be built over the old cabin as it sat in a field on the hill above
the spring. The foundation was being prepared and the cornerstone of the sheltering building was to be laid on February 12, just 100 years from the day of Abraham Lincoln's birth. The President, Theodore Roosevelt, and other notables were preparing to take part in the ceremonies.

A number of us students and some of the faculty were eager to witness this historic event. In keeping with the rugged life of the one to be honored, we boys at the training school (now Lindsey Wilson Junior College) decided to make the journey from Columbia to the Lincoln farm on foot. As it was only fifty miles away, we believed that we could walk the distance as quickly as it would take to travel the long way around by the public conveyances of that time: horse-drawn stages to Campbellsville, then by a mixed train (part freight and part passenger) to Lebanon; then the regular train to Lebanon Junction; then to Elizabethtown, then to Hodgenville, with delays at each change.

Starting at Columbia on the morning of the 10th, we would arrive at the farm on Thursday, the 11th. But as the days passed, one after another of my promised companions decided against walking so I was left to make the trip alone.

On the day before setting out, I drew a few dollars from my meager account, then went to talk to Dr. U.L. Taylor, an elderly physician of Columbia, who had spent years practicing in Larue and Green Counties. He carefully gave me all the road information I needed.

The next morning, it being Wednesday, I started out, going to Coburg, then turned left on the Greensburg Road. I stopped with a friendly farmer named Jim Johnson for my noon meal. Late in the afternoon I came to the Green River a mile or two east of Greensburg. A mule team wagon was fording the river and I rode over in it. I lodged that night at the Gupton Hotel, near an only stone courthouse, built in Virginia and never moved!

I was on my way by 7 o'clock the next morning. Most of the road toward Hodgenville had been graded some time before, so that it was not muddy except in spots. Passing Summersville and Dezarn, I ate my noon meal at the home of Mrs. Warren, near a large spring. After passing through Allendale and Mount Sherman, I got to Buffalo about 4 o'clock. There I was directed to across farms 3 miles to the Thomas Lincoln farm.

On a well traveled road in sight of the cabin, I engaged a night's lodging with a farmer named Cissel. Before supper I went on up to the cabin where a few men were making final preparations for the cornerstone laying. I examined the cabin inside out as it thus sat in an old field at the top of a slope with a basin or sinkhole in front. I drank from the spring that emerged from a small cavern halfway down the slope.

Above the spring stood a white oak tree. I wondered if it had been a sapling when Abe's little feet trod the path to the spring. As night was approaching, I retired to Mr. Cissel's where supper was waiting.

The whole family seemed shocked when I mentioned my intention to go back and sleep in the cabin that night. They indignantly told me it could not be done, that a cordon of soldiers guarded the cabin and wouldn't let me within a hundred yards of it. They seemed so determined that I decided to go to bed and after they were asleep to slip out and try to get into the cabin. They showed me to bed in a back room, where I sank down in the thick feather tick.

I knew nothing more until the young man shook me and said, "Better get up. Breakfast is ready." At breakfast they told me the son had a job with the construction crew, and that other members of the family had a "stand" where they intended to sell things that day. So they had to get up early. By about 3:30 a.m. I had eaten breakfast and paid for my night's lodging (about 50 cents). Then I stepped out into the darkness and went to the cabin.
There was no one about the cabin, so I went on in. A fire smoldered in the fireplace. I sat on a bench in front of the fire and listened to a blustery shower pelt the roof and the walls, reflecting that I was sheltered by the same timbers that had sheltered Abraham Lincoln. I visualized the crude furnishings and the activities in progress there that morning exactly a century ago as the Man of Destiny was being ushered into the world.

I stirred up the fire and made copious notes of my fancies in preparation for an account to be published in our school paper, The Blue and White. Also I used my knife to pry splinters from the log walls to give to my schoolmates. (For this offense I have long been heartily ashamed.) Then I stretched out on the bench and in the warm glow of the dying fire was soon asleep. I saw startled awake by the door being pushed open and a voice saying, "Looka there. There's Old Abe himself!" And then some laughing men, among them the Cissel youth, came in and joked with me awhile.

I told them I was preparing a "writeup" for my school paper. They said, "Go ahead," and as it was daylight went about their work. An hour later I had my notebook nearly full and a guard came and asked me what I was doing. I told him I was preparing material for a newspaper article. He said, "Show me your credentials." "Credentials," I said, "What do you mean?" "Your identification papers that also show what paper you represent." "Oh, I've not got any." "Then you'll have to come out."

So I followed him out. But I was happy. I had my notes, my souvenirs, and had had a nap in the cabin just 100 years after Lincoln's birth.

It was 8:30 and the people had begun to assemble. A cold wind was blowing and the temperature was falling. A large circus tent sheltered the speakers platform and most of the thousands of people who had crammed themselves under it by the time the President's party arrived at about 12:30. I joined the group assembling in front of the speakers' stand and there I held my place for about four hours.

The chilly wind romped and rumpled over and about the tent, sometimes swelling out a floppy canvas and snapping it back to make it sound like a firecracker. The crowd was so vast and pressing that I could draw up my feet and hang suspended between a rope and the bodies pressed against mine.

I glimpsed a few of the Lindsey Wilson delegation: the Rev. A.R. Kasey and his son, Taylor; Mont Murrell, Mont Gabbert and their (sic) sister Gertrude [Gabbert]. Others of my schoolmates there were Tom Stephenson, Ike Story, Philip Williams, George Hancock, Bud Stearman, Elam Huddleston and J.T. Evans. Finally the V.I.P.'s came and took their places on the platform. I noted that the high hats, the long coats, the military officials, resplendent in insignia and gold braid, with the richly attired women on the stage made a show the likes of which I had never seen before.

The President, Theodore Roosevelt, his wife and daughter Ethel sat directly in front of me and only a few feet away. Ethel Roosevelt was pretty, wearing a dark brown dress under a gray coat trimmed with white fur. Her eyes roved impersonally over the sea of faces. When they met my admiring gaze, she smiled. The chill that had been mounting in my body for an hour or two left me. I wasn't cold any more!

All of the people on the stage looked healthy and comfortable except our own Governor A.E. Wilson and his wife. Their sallow complexions indicated poor health and I felt sorry for them.

The speeches began. Governor Wilson made a few remarks, Governor Joe Folk of Missouri spoke at length. Speeches were made by the Secretary of War Luke E. Wright and General James G. Wilson of New York.

The speaker of the day arose and the crowd cheered noisily. The President began his speech, but only a few of us in the front could hear him. Then Teddy climbed up on the lectern saying, "If
they can't hear me maybe they can see me." The crowd cheered wildly again but the lectern was too unsteady, so he climbed down, finished his speech and, as the others had done, laid his manuscript in a leaden box, to be placed in the cornerstone.

A photographer got a picture of the departing party. In February, 1952, National Geographic Magazine, carried that picture (on page 147). My friends recognized me in the background, watching the V.I.P.'s depart.

Though the crowd was estimated at about 8,000, the only automobiles I saw there were the ones bearing the V.I.P.'s in Hodgenville.

My "Reflections on Lincoln at His Birthplace" was published in the school paper and a week later in The Adair County News and The Elizabethtown News. Their files still bear my article, yellowed with 52 years of age. I am not yet yellowed with age -- just frosted.

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Fred Rainwater, athletic superstar

Sports have long played a role at Lindsey Wilson. The school fielded a baseball team in the spring of 1904, the first term of the school's existence, and both men's and women's basketball teams arrived on the scene soon thereafter. The March 28, 1908 "L.W.T.S. Notes" in the Adair County News reported, "Baseball, basketball, tennis and 'dees' are the principal games being played on the hill now."

However, one annual sports event, the Field Day, which always drew a crowd of spectators (and at which the best of order always prevailed) has been nearly lost in the mists of time.

The first Field Day (or at least the first one reported by the News), took place on Saturday, May, 10th, 1906, and on that occasion, Mont Richards carried the day, claiming five events and the associated prizes: a scarf pin, razor, fountain pen, straw hat, and cravat, not to mention the gold medal presented by Rev. A.R. Kasey for winning the most events.

The next year, however, William Frederick--just plain Fred to everyone who knew him--Rainwater, a lanky young man from western Pulaski County, Ky., made his first of many appearances in the competition and in the process, became Lindsey Wilson's first athletic superstar.

A marker on Lindsey's campus near where a grand old oak tree stood for decades informs the reader thus:

"The Rainwater Oak Tree
Planted in 1907 by Lindsey Wilson student Fred Rainwater whom legend describes as a Cherokee Indian and long-distance runner who planted this tree as his legacy to future generations of students.

Fred indeed made a name for himself in the track and field events. At one point, The News called him "the well-known pedestrian"--referring to the "stroll" Fred took in February 1909, mentioned below--"high jumper and fast runner."

He first drew mention as a contestant in the Field Day held on Saturday, May 11, 1907, reported in the May 15th edition of The News: "1 mile run, Fred Rainwater, time, 5 min. 32 sec., silk umbrella, given by Athletic Association."

In 1908, on May 2nd (reported in the May 6th News), Fred took two events, the mile run, in a time of four minutes, 45 seconds; and the 440 yard run in one minute, five seconds. The prizes were, respectively, a fancy vest, donated by Coffey & Cravens, and a set of cuff buttons, compliments of John Flowers. (At that time, the world record for the mile by an amateur runner was fractionally
About three months prior to the May '09 Field Day, Fred again found his name gracing the pages of the Adair County News. The February 17, 1909 edition reported several people, including Mr. Rainwater, had "represented the Lindsey-Wilson at the Hodgenville celebration" of the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth. The article went on to say that Fred "started [to Hodgenville] on Thursday (sic) and made the trip there and back afoot. He is a perfect athlete and is the fastest runner in the school. The day before starting to Hodgenville he got a little exercise by running two miles."

Apparently that long February perambulation got Fred well limbered up, for at the Field Day events on May 8, 1909 (reported in the May 12th News) he won no fewer than four events: the pole vault, with a height of nine feet, five inches; the half-mile run, in a blistering two minutes, nine & three-fifths seconds; the mile run, in a time of six minutes (sic; may be a typo), six and one-half seconds; and the sack race. These winning efforts earned him the following prizes: a pair of shoes, donated by Russell & Co.; a fancy vest, donated by Jack Young; a hat, donated by former Kentucky Lt. Gov. J.R. Hindman; and a .22 rifle, donated by Dr. Dunbar.

The following year, on May 12, 1910 (reported in the May 18th paper), Fred again cleaned house, winning five events this time: mile race, 440 yard run, pole vault, potato race and sack race. Unfortunately, the News recorded no information other than the event and the surname of the winner but the article ended thus: "Rainwater is to go to Danville to enter the contests on the long distance runs and we are sure he is going to capture some of the prizes."

The May 25, 1910 News gave this brief summary of how he well-represented Lindsey Wilson and Columbia: "Mr. Fred Rainwater, a student of the Lindsey-Wilson, made good at Danville last week. He entered the foot races, Field Day, and won the two and one miles races and was second in the half mile race."

A contemporary account of the track meet noted that Fred finished second overall in the individual track competitions and stated of the mile race, "Rainwater overcame a big lead taken by Moore, a Louisville man, and by a wonderful sprint won out by about fifty feet." (The Kentucky Advocate, Danville, Ky., May 23, 1910.) Over half a century later, Joe Creason wrote, "It was [Fred] who made his uniformed opponents swallow their laughs by winning the state high school mile race in 1909 (sic) despite the fact he was wearing brogan shoes and bib overalls." ("Joe Creason's Kentucky" column, in the Louisville Courier-Journal, November 17, 1966.)

Although Fred attended Lindsey in the spring 1911 term, he didn't compete in the Field Day activities but his younger sister Susie won the egg race, and his cousin--and future wife--finished second in the egg race and the ball throwing contest.

During that spring 1911 term, Fred was on one of the school debate teams and helped chalk up a win for his team, arguing in the affirmative on the debate point, "Resolved, that United States Senators should be elected by popular vote." The previous year, he and M.R. Gabbert of the Columbia Debating Society had teamed up to defeat the Frogge Literary Society arguing in the affirmative for "Resolved, that the death penalty should be abolished."

In 1912, he was back and in rare athletic form, winning an incredible seven events and finishing second in another (the pole chinning contest). Proclaimed a front page article in The News, "All the races were very good and Lindsey presents some exceptionally fine material in the way of runners. Fred Rainwater, as usual, was the star runner, winning all the races he was in. He also got the medal awarded by Bro. Kasey, as the best all around athlete, scoring 48 points. Holt took second, making 18..."

Come the spring of 1913, Fred, then just short of his 26th birthday, finished both his athletic and
academic careers at Lindsey Wilson, the former with seven more victories, taking the prize in the pole vault, 220 yard dash, 440 yard dash, half mile race, one mile run, sack race, and potato race. By virtue of racking up the highest overall number of points, he again won the gold medal offered by Rev. A.R. Kasey.

A few days later, Fred gave his commencement speech, titled simply "The Teacher." Two years later, he married his Texas-born cousin, Lottie Garner, and by mid-1917, they and their only child, a son, Ruric, had removed from Pulaski County to a homestead outside of Jordan, Montana, much to the chagrin of Lottie's father, Joseph Roy "Joe" Garner.

In the early fall of 1921, Joe wrote to his sister Nan Williams, "If Fred wants to do the right thing he will sell or give away his holdings in Montana and in the spring about May take Lottie & Ruric to some place in civilization where decent people can live."

Toward the end of 1922, the Rainwater family returned to Pulaski County where Fred and Lottie farmed and taught school for several decades. A letter written by Una Garner Taylor (1899-2004), a kinswoman both of Fred and Lottie, stated in part, "I visited them once and Lottie was grubbing away in the garden and told me no one on earth could be as happy as she was with her husband and little boy. " (Loretta Una Garner Taylor to Jim Garner, January 3, 1985, personal correspondence.) Lottie passed in 1965, a few months before their 50th wedding anniversary, and Fred passed in the spring of 1969. Quite appropriately, their shared grave marker bears the inscription "Teachers."

And finally, this brief nugget from the "General News Briefs of Week" published in the July 15, 1921 edition of The Glasgow Courier, Glasgow, Valley County, Montana:

**Storm Wrecks Cabin**

Jordan, July 7.--Fred Rainwater, a school teacher at Valley View, was knocked unconscious and suffered several fractures of the bones in his left shoulder when his cabin near the schoolhouse was demolished by the recent windstorm. He was brought to Jordan by neighbors who found him in the ruins of the cabin. Physicians say his injuries are not serious.

(The wording of this piques my curiosity. If the neighbors found him, where were Lottie and Ruric? They--Lottie and Ruric--were, I believe, in Montana at the time, as Joe didn't send for them to come to Texas until the forepart of September that year. I wonder if he were homesteading a tract of land.)