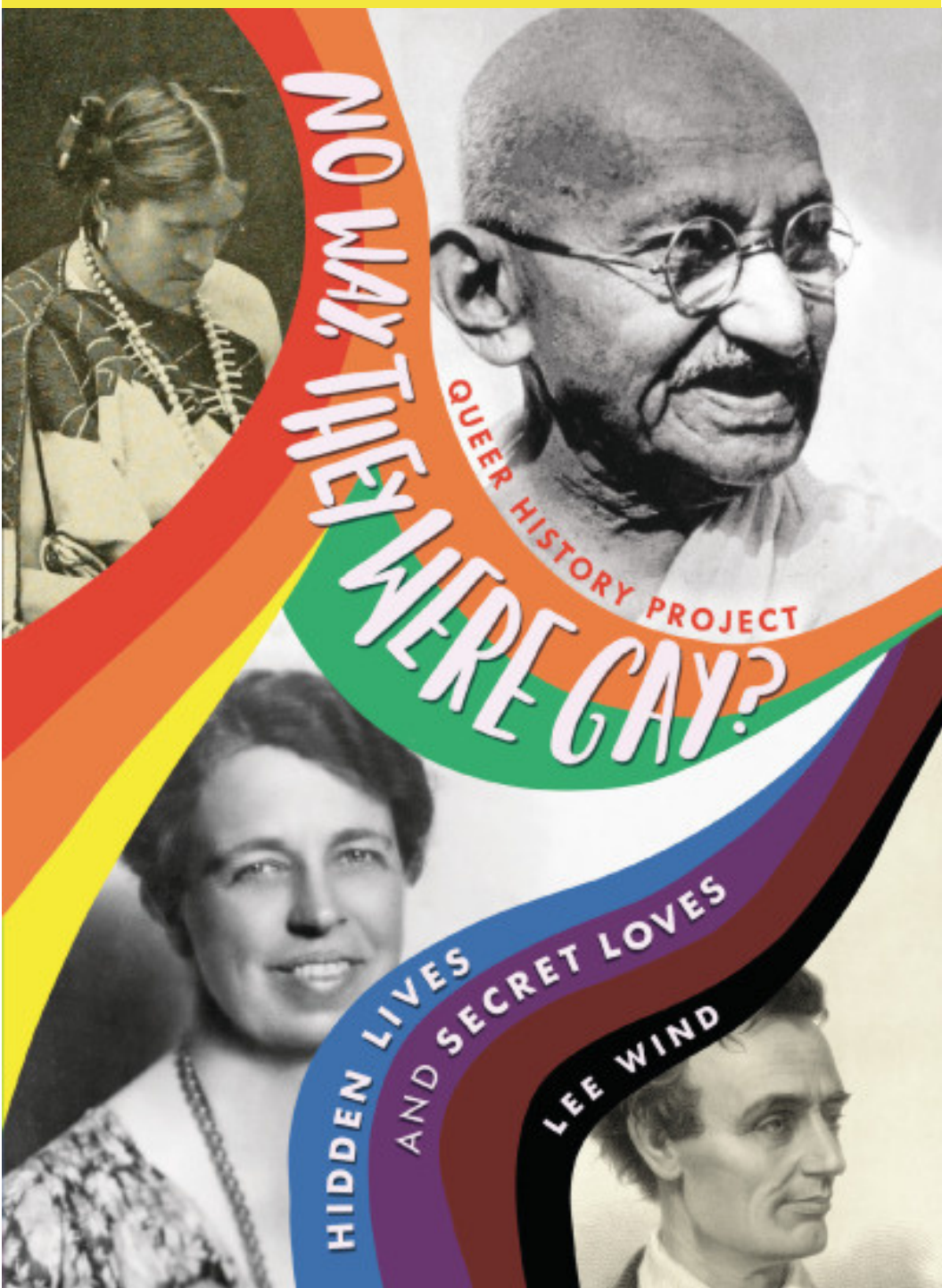


EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT



NO WAY THEY

QUEER HISTORY PROJECT

WERE GAY?

HIDDEN LIVES

AND SECRET LOVES

LEE WIND

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR
NO WAY, THEY WERE GAY?

“Such an important book, both enlightening and entertaining. Highly recommended for readers age 10–110!”

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“This fascinating look at the hidden lives of some of history’s most important figures deserves a place in every library, not to mention the hands of readers, many of whom will see much needed reflections of themselves.”

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“I can’t believe this book hasn’t existed until now!! It’s a joyful and fascinating read that reminds us that LGBTQ+ people have always existed, thrived and made important contributions to society. No matter what your age, orientation or gender identity, Lee Wind makes you feel like this book was written for you.”

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“This is a fascinating book that challenges the simplistic history we have been taught to believe for far too long. Lee Wind illuminates the complexities of historical figures, and through them, readers are given permission to be their true, complex selves An important book for readers of all ages.”

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“Fascinating, ambitious, diverse, rigorously researched, and much-needed—this book will save lives.”

—Kathleen Krull, winner of the Children’s Book Guild Nonfiction Award for body of work, and author of the *Lives Of* series

“This work serves not only to educate everyone who reads it, but also to help LGBT youth feel seen, to know people like them exist in the world, and to have role models that are among the most revered of leaders. Do I wish I’d had this in junior high school? You bet!”

—Dr. Judy Grahn, author of *Another Mother Tongue*

“Lee Wind has done a fabulous job pulling back the curtain to reveal some long suppressed history. Not only is *No Way, They Were Gay?* fascinating reading, I firmly believe it is a book that is literally going to be a lifesaver for some young readers.”

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“I think as a teen I might’ve chosen to major in History if I’d read Lee Wind’s fun, fast-paced, and thought-provoking book. I love how it lays out the evidence about some of our past’s greatest heroes, invites us to draw our own conclusions, and inspires us, regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity to be true to who we are.”

—Alex Sanchez, author of *Rainbow Boys* and *You Brought Me the Ocean*

“Lee’s work reminds readers, especially LGBTQ readers, that we all come from somewhere and that even though the history books may seek to silence or throw a shadow over our truths, our truths are ours to share with the world with pride.”

—Matthew C. Winner, host of *The Children’s Book Podcast*

“Lee Wind offers LGBTQ youth (and anyone who cares about them) a compelling and often surprising look at a history they may not have been conscious of. A powerful and necessary book.”

—Ellen Wittlinger, author of *Hard Love* and *Parrotfish*

THE QUEER HISTORY PROJECT

NO WAY, THEY WERE GAY?

HIDDEN LIVES AND
SECRET LOVES

LEE WIND



FOR MY HUSBAND, MARK, WHOSE LOVE GIVES ME WINGS;
FOR OUR DAUGHTER, WHO FILLS OUR DAYS WITH JOY AND GRATITUDE;
AND FOR YOU, READER.
THIS BOOK IS FOR US ALL.

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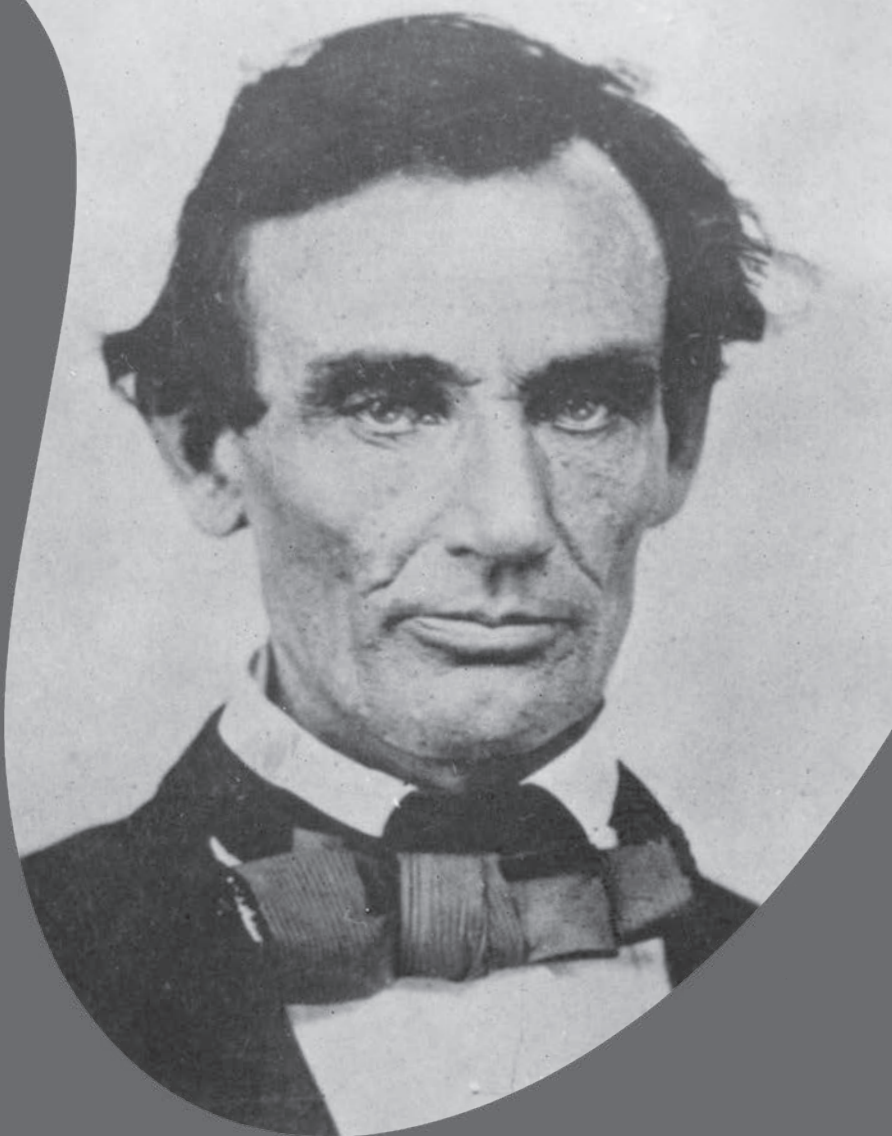
CHAPTER 2

PRESIDENT

LINCOLN

ABRAHAM

1809-1865 • UNITED STATES



I NOW HAVE NO DOUBT THAT IT IS THE PECULIAR MISFORTUNE OF BOTH YOU AND ME TO DREAM DREAMS OF ELYSIUM FAR EXCEEDING ALL THAT ANYTHING EARTHLY CAN REALIZE. FAR SHORT OF YOUR DREAMS AS YOU MAY BE, NO WOMAN COULD DO MORE TO REALIZE THEM THAN THAT SAME BLACK-EYED FANNY.

—Abraham Lincoln, in an 1842 letter to Joshua Fry Speed

WE ALL KNOW WHO ABRAHAM WAS

Abraham Lincoln's rise to president is the stuff of legend. Born in a log cabin, he got America through the Civil War, freed the slaves, and preserved the Union.

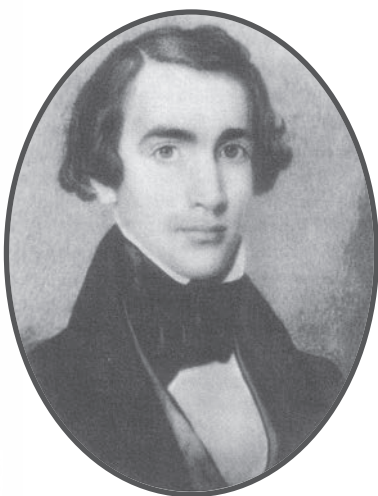
Or do we?

ABRAHAM WAS ALSO A MAN WHO LOVED ANOTHER MAN

Before that fame, when he was twenty-eight years old, Abraham arrived in Springfield, Illinois, to find work as a lawyer. He was poor and didn't even have a place to sleep. He found a carpenter who could build him a bed, and then went to the A. Y. Ellis & Company general store to buy a mattress, pillow, sheets, and blanket. That's how he met a young store clerk named Joshua Fry Speed.

Abraham couldn't afford the seventeen-dollar bill. Instead of giving Abraham the items on credit, Joshua suggested Abraham move in with him above the store, offering to share the bed he slept in. Abraham agreed. At the time it wasn't unusual for men to share beds. What might be

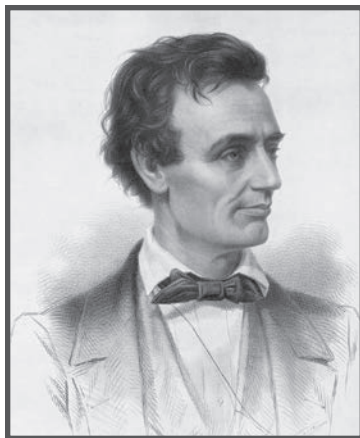
considered unusual is that they continued to share that bed for four years, long past when Abraham succeeded as a lawyer. Long past Abraham's being able to afford his own bed. They lived together, sharing that bed, even while Abraham



Portrait of Joshua Fry Speed from around 1837, when he and Abraham first met

courted a young local woman, Mary Todd.

Around January 1, 1841, Joshua told Abraham he was moving back to his home state of Kentucky. That same week, Abraham broke off his engagement to Mary and entered one of the biggest depressions of his life. A few weeks later, Abraham wrote to his law partner:



A portrait of Abraham used in his 1860 presidential campaign

I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. . . . Whether I shall ever be better I can not tell; I awfully forbode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better, it appears to me.

In February 1842, Joshua married Fanny Henning.

In November 1842, Abraham married Mary. They would eventually have four sons.

Fast-forward almost twenty years. Abraham was the president, and the American Civil War was raging. Union general William T. Sherman was desperate for supplies, but the government in Washington was ignoring his requests. Sherman went to Joshua to ask for his help, because he'd heard that Joshua knew the president. Joshua told the general to write down everything he needed. Then Joshua went to see Abraham in the White House. Three days later, Sherman got everything he had requested. Astonished, he

asked Joshua, **"How is this that more attention is paid to the requests of you, a citizen, than me, a General in the army? . . . You had better take command here."** Joshua told him of his history with the president and said, **"The only mistake you made, General, was not asking for more."**

History has lost most of the letters Joshua wrote Abraham, but we do have a number of the letters Abraham wrote Joshua. Was Abraham Lincoln gay? Bi? Was he in love with Joshua Fry Speed?

Before you form your opinion, read Abraham's own words:

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS, FEBRUARY 13, 1842

Dear Speed: Yours of the 1st instant came to hand three or four days ago. When this shall reach you, you will have been Fanny's husband several days.

You know my desire to befriend you is everlasting; that I will never cease while I know how to do anything. But you will always hereafter be on ground that I have never occupied, and consequently, if advice were needed, I might advise wrong. I do fondly hope, however, that you will never again need any comfort from abroad. But should I be mistaken in this, should excessive pleasure still be accompanied with a painful counterpart at times, still let me urge you, as I have ever done, to remember, in the depth and even the agony of despondency, that very shortly you are to feel well again. I am now fully convinced that you love her as ardently as you are capable

This letter was written the day after Abraham's birthday and the day before Valentine's Day, just a few days after Joshua married Fanny.

Their connection is "everlasting."

Abraham hopes that being married to Fanny will meet Joshua's emotional needs.

of loving. Your ever being happy in her presence, and your intense anxiety about her health, if there were nothing else, would place this beyond all dispute in my mind. I incline to think it probable that your nerves will fail you occasionally for a while; but once you get them fairly graded now, that trouble is over forever. I think, if I were you, in case my mind were not exactly right, I would avoid being idle. I would immediately engage in some business, or go to making preparations for it, which would be the same thing. If you went through the ceremony calmly, or even with sufficient composure not to excite alarm in any present, you are safe beyond question, and in two or three months, to say the most, will be the happiest of men.

I would desire you to give my particular respects to Fanny; but perhaps you will not wish her to know you have received this, lest she should desire to see it. Make her write me an answer to my last letter to her at any rate. I would set great value upon another letter from her. Write me whenever you have leisure.

Yours forever,
A. LINCOLN.

Is this written in code? Does it mean that just like Joshua (who married Fanny), Abraham is now actively courting women?

P.S. I have been quite a man since you left.

Abraham is trying to convince Joshua that Joshua really does love Fanny.

Yeah, after that last sentence, Joshua's not going to want to show this letter to Fanny. Or she'll ask him what exactly would have *alarmed* everyone at their wedding . . .

SPRINGFIELD, FEBRUARY 25, 1842

Dear Speed: I received yours of the 12th written the day you went down to William's place, some days since, but delayed answering it till I should receive the promised one of the 16th, which came last night.

I opened the latter with intense anxiety and trepidation; so much, that although it turned out better than I expected, I have hardly yet, at the distance of ten hours, become calm.

Ten hours later and he's still freaking out. This is really important to Abraham!

I tell you, Speed, our forebodings (for which you and I are rather peculiar) are all the worst sort of nonsense. I fancied, from the time I received your letter of Saturday, that the one of Wednesday was never to come, and yet it did come, and what is more, it is perfectly clear, both from its tone and handwriting, that you were much happier, or, if you think the term preferable, less miserable, when you wrote it than when you wrote the last one before. You had so obviously improved at the very time I so much feared you would have grown worse. You say that something indescribably horrible and alarming still haunts you. You will not say that three months from now, I will venture. When your nerves once get steady now, the whole trouble will be over forever. Nor should you become impatient at their being even very slow in becoming steady. Again you

Joshua married Fanny a few weeks earlier and is miserable. Abraham is trying to tell him it will be okay.

say, you much fear that that Elysium of which you have dreamed so much is never to be realized. Well, if it shall not,

Elysium means "heaven."

I dare swear it will not be the fault of her who is now your wife. I now have no doubt that it is the peculiar misfortune of both you and me to dream dreams of Elysium far exceeding all that anything earthly can realize. Far short of your dreams as you may be, no woman could do more to realize them than that same black-eyed Fanny. If you could but contemplate her through my imagination, it would appear ridiculous to you that any one should for a moment think of being unhappy with her. My old father used to have a saying that "If you make a bad bargain, hug it all the tighter"; and it occurs to me that if the bargain you have just closed can possibly be called a bad one, it is certainly the most pleasant one for applying that maxim to which my fancy can by any effort picture.

So the dreams of heaven that Joshua and Abraham shared didn't involve women.

The "bad bargain" Joshua needs to hug "all the tighter" was his marrying Fanny.

I write another letter, inclosing this, which you can show her, if she desires it. I do this because she would think strangely, perhaps, should you tell her

This is a secret letter—sent with a decoy letter that was safe for Joshua to show Fanny!

that you received no letters from me, or, telling her you do, should refuse to let her see them. I close this, entertaining the confident hope that every successive letter I shall have from you (which I here pray may not be few, or far between) may show you possessing a more steady hand and cheerful heart than the last preceding it.

As ever, your friend,
LINCOLN.

And on October 5, 1842, Abraham wrote Joshua this:

But I began this letter not for what I have been writing, but to say something on that subject which you know to be of such infinite solicitude to me. The immense sufferings you endured from the first days

of September till the middle of February, you never tried to conceal from me, and I well understood. You have now been the husband of a lovely woman nearly eight months. That you are happier now than you ever were the day you married her

Joshua was so miserable on the day he got married that Abraham is saying if he'd stayed that unhappy, he'd be dead.

I well know, for without, you could not be living. But I have your word for it, too, and the returning elasticity of spirits which is manifested in your letters. But I want to ask a closer question, "Are you

now in feeling as well as in judgment

glad that you are married as you are?"

From anybody but me this would be an impudent question, not to be tolerated; but I know you will pardon it in me.

Please answer it quickly, as I feel impatient to know. I have sent my love to your Fanny so often, I fear she is getting tired of it. However, I venture to tender it again.

**Yours Forever,
LINCOLN.**

Abraham's question reveals that Joshua judged marrying Fanny as the right thing to do, but he didn't feel it. And now Abraham wants to know, Did feelings for his wife come later?

"Please answer it quickly . . ." What was going on in Abraham's life that he needed to know the answer to his

question so urgently? We don't have Joshua's reply, but less than a month after he sent this letter, Abraham married Mary.

Did Abraham feel the same way about Mary that Joshua felt about Fanny?

Did Abraham also judge marrying Mary the right thing to do?

Did he hope that feelings for the woman who would become his wife would grow after they were married?

In his early twenties, Abraham wrote this poem to humiliate an adversary. Intent aside, it's fascinating to see that two men marrying each other was even talked about in the 1830s.



Abraham has been on the penny since 1909, the hundredth anniversary of his birth. As of 2020, more than 130 billion pennies were in circulation!

**For Reuben and Charles have married two girls,
But Billy has married a boy.
The girls he had tried on every side,
But none he could get to agree;
All was in vain, he went home again,
And since that he's married to Natty.**

Natty is a
nickname for
Nathaniel.

TRICKY TRICKS

Tens of thousands of nonfiction books have been written about Abraham Lincoln, but only a handful have ever directly

addressed Abraham's love for another man.

This book is only the second one for young readers to talk about it.

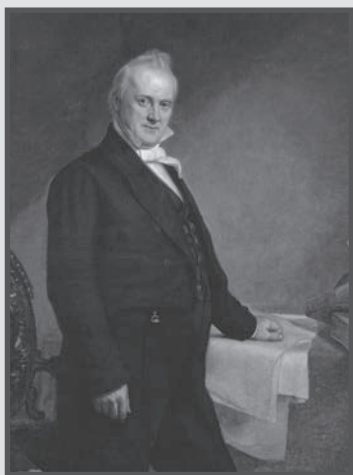
Biographers sometimes spoke about Abraham and Joshua's relationship using coded language, such as Carl Sandburg saying in his 1926 *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*: "Their births, the loins and tissues of their fathers and mothers,

accident, fate, providence, had given these two men streaks of lavender, spots soft as May violets.”

Lavender is a shade of purple, “the sacred color associated with Gayness,” as gay culture historian Judy Grahn put it. And violets “were worn by both men and women in sixteenth-century England to indicate that they did not intend to marry.”

WHO DID JAMES BUCHANAN LOVE?

James Buchanan is often cited as another US president who might have been gay. A lifelong bachelor and the president immediately before Abraham Lincoln, James had a close relationship with William Rufus King. But once again, few of the letters the two men wrote to each other survived.



An 1859 painting of James Buchanan

Here's some of what we do know:

From 1834 to 1844, James and William were both senators (James from Pennsylvania and William from Alabama), and they lived in the same Washington, DC, boardinghouse. They were together so often that other politicians started calling them “Buchanan and his wife,” “Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan,” and “Aunt Fancy” and “Aunt Nancy” (derogatory terms at the time for gay men).

In the slang of the 1930s, “streak of lavender” meant “an effeminate man,” a term often used to describe gay men. Without taking the risk of saying it, was Sandburg trying to tell some readers (gay readers who could decode his language) that Abraham and Joshua were in love?

And in 2012, in a HuffPost article, Sylvia Rhue recalled asking the Reverend Cindi Love why William Herndon

In what some historians see as an effort to stop the gossip, William took a post as a US minister to France. Cue the mean-spirited jokes in Washington about their “divorce.”

After William died in 1853 (he was vice president under Franklin Pierce for only forty-five days before his death), James wrote to his friend Cornelia (Mrs. James I.) Roosevelt:

Franklin Pierce was the fourteenth US president, James Buchanan was the fifteenth, and Abraham Lincoln was the sixteenth.

I am now “solitary and alone,” having no companion in the house with me. I have gone a wooing to several gentlemen, but have not succeeded with any one of them. I feel that it is not good for man to be alone; and should not be astonished to find myself married to some old maid who can nurse me when I am sick, provide good dinners for me when I am well, and not expect from me any very ardent or romantic affection.

Five years later, James Buchanan became the fifteenth president of the United States. So maybe Abraham wasn't the only male US president to love another man.

(Abraham's law partner, then biographer) never gave any indication in his writings that Abraham had been gay. Love replied, **"William Herndon was my great-great-uncle, and he was gay, and he was Lincoln's lover."** Love told Rhue that the information had been passed down through the years in their family, but had not been made public.

MORE OF THE STORY

Perhaps more than for anyone else profiled in this book, the suggestion that Abraham Lincoln was in love with another man seems to upset Americans the most. As if Abraham's place in history would be diminished if it were true. As if his being gay or bi would make him less great. As if just discussing this is an insult to his memory.



The statue of Abraham in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC

But when the truth of people's loves and lives have been purposely hidden, it's time to unlock history's closet door and celebrate that there have been men who loved other men throughout time. Sometimes, they are the historical figures!

We have the surviving letters that Abraham sent Joshua, and transcripts of those letters are reproduced in many different history books as well as online. So the information is available for all of us to read and consider. Each of us gets to decide for ourselves.

Some historians believe that Abraham loved Joshua. Most others don't agree.

What do you think?

Source Notes

- 39: “The hasty departure . . . signatory of the dedication.”: Shakespeare, 10–12.
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- 39: Sonnet 60 “Like as the waves . . . hasten to their end . . .”: Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1760.
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- 42: Sonnet 20 “A woman’s face with Nature’s own hand painted . . . Mine be thy love, and thy love’s use their treasure.”: Shakespeare, 1753.
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- 43: Tricky Tricks with the sonnets: “altered so that . . . to a woman”: Shakespeare, 1745–1748.
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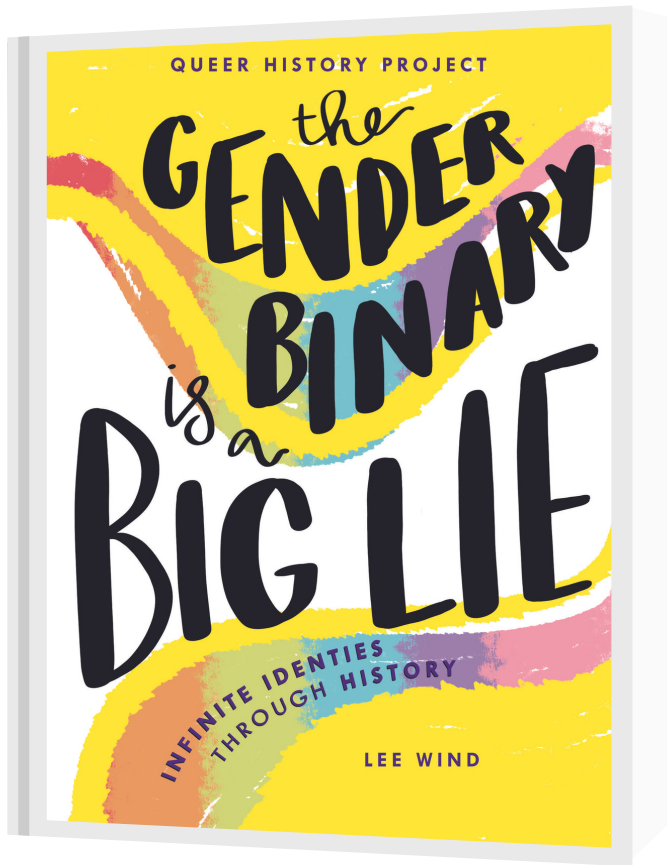
CHAPTER 2: ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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- 54: Abraham's October 5, 1842, letter to Joshua, "But I began this letter . . . Yours Forever, Lincoln": Kincaid, *Joshua Fry Speed*, 54–55; Lincoln, *Abraham Lincoln Speeches and Writings*, 161–162.
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Author Lee Wind takes readers on a journey to examine gender identity and representation throughout history—from ancient third-gender burial sites to people identifying as gender fluid today. Learn how cultures past and present debunk the idea of a gender binary.

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