

THE CIVIL WAR OF  
Amos  
Abernathy

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**HARPER**

*An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers*

The Civil War of Amos Abernathy  
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ISBN 978-0-06-311986-4

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Typography by Corina Lupp

22 23 24 25 26 SB 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



First Edition

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Write what you know.* That's what my mom told me growing up, but I was too busy telling stories about magic and fantastical creatures. It wasn't until after graduate school that something shifted inside me and her words made sense. Finally, at nearly thirty years old, I was ready to write something personal. Something close to my heart.

Like Amos, I know what it's like to be openly gay and proud of my identity. Like Ben, I know what it is like to be afraid to come out as a young person. From about fourth to seventh grade, I volunteered as a nineteenth-century historical reenactor. Ben and I also share a history of being homeschooled, though my educational experience was far more complicated than his. I wanted to bring these experiences that shaped me together in a story, but I didn't know how to do that until I realized something else: as much as I needed to write what I know, I also needed to write what I *didn't* know.

The more I thought about it, the more apparent it became that I didn't know quite a lot. Why didn't I know more about LGBTQ+ people from before the early 1900s? Why hadn't I read anything about queer historical figures in my textbooks? Where was the history of people like me? In that moment I realized that Amos, Ben, and I all had the same questions: Could we have existed back then? Did any LGBTQ+ people fight in the Civil War? If they did, why didn't I know about them?

Like most people with a question, I went straight to Google. My search results were almost identical to what Amos experiences. Initially there was more information about queer European history than American. I adjusted my keywords. History about queer Americans began to trickle through, but I wasn't satisfied. I wanted to know if there was someone close to home, someone from Illinois. It wasn't until I searched "queer Civil War soldier Illinois" that everything changed. Albert D. J. Cashier's Wikipedia page was the first result. I read the entry and leaped down the rabbit hole, looking for anything and everything about this man.

I scoured the web for additional primary and secondary sources, not just about Albert but about the Civil War, the enslavement of Black people, American life during the nineteenth century, and other queer people who lived at that time. I quickly came to understand that sexual orientation

and gender identity were thought of in very different terms in nineteenth-century America than they are today. Defining gender and sexual identity wasn't going to be simple or straightforward. I would have to interpret facts to the best of my ability. For example, I concluded that Abraham Lincoln was part of the LGBTQ+ community because of the evidence I was able to find, not because his sexual identity was explicitly stated.

The more I learned about Albert, Lincoln, and the complicated history of gender and sexual identity, the more I realized that this story was going to be bigger than showing and celebrating the existence of gay boys and men; it had to be about the LGBTQ+ community at large.

I continued my research. I read books from my local library and consulted with expert librarians at Vermont College of Fine Arts. I took my research on the road and visited the Naper Settlement, which is a historical center in Naperville, Illinois, that partially inspired the Living History Park in this novel, and Albert D. J. Cashier's home and gravesite in Saunemin, Illinois.

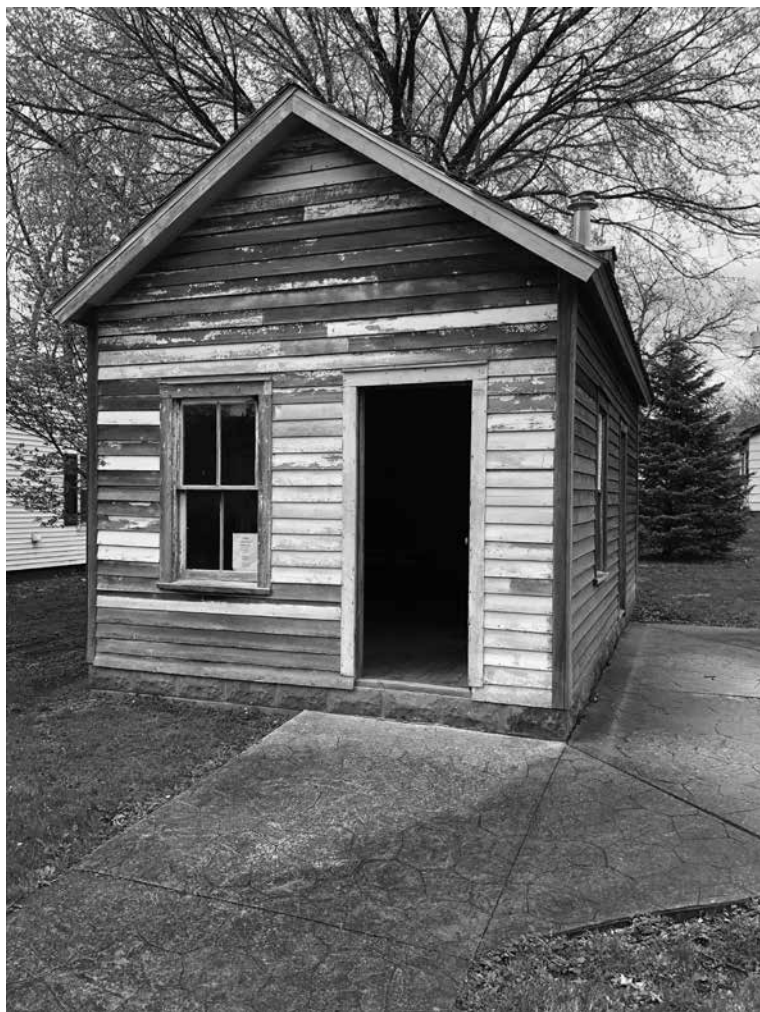
The historical information in this novel, including everything Amos learns and shares about Albert's life, is as accurate as possible. Albert was assigned female at birth and was an Irish immigrant who lived in Belvidere and then Saunemin, Illinois. He served for three years in the Union army during the American Civil War, used he/him

pronouns, and lived his life as a man. He was beloved by his community then and is still fondly remembered today, his memory passed down generation to generation.

In all of my researching, I consulted numerous sources. Sometimes information varied depending on who was telling the story. When I found differing facts, I went with what I believe is the more reliable source or what the majority of sources agree upon.

If you want to learn more about Albert D. J. Cashier, the American Civil War, nineteenth-century America, LGBTQ+ and BIPOC American history, and other historical figures mentioned in this novel, I've listed some resources here for further exploration.

I hope you leave this novel asking your own questions. One book can never provide you with all the answers. What questions did Amos and I *not* ask? What questions still need to be answered? What would you need to do to find those answers? Whose story needs to be told? Whose voice does the world need to hear?



"ALBERT D. J. CASHIER'S HOME IN SAUNEMIN, IL" PHOTO CREDIT: MICHAEL LEALI



"ALBERT D. J. CASHIER'S HEADSTONE IN SAUNEMIN, IL" PHOTO CREDIT: MICHAEL LEALI



## ★ ABOUT ALBERT D. J. CASHIER ★

**American Battlefield Trust:** [www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/albert-cashier](http://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/albert-cashier)

**Saunemin, Illinois's Albert D. J. Cashier Website:** [www.sites.google.com/site/albertdjcashier/home](http://www.sites.google.com/site/albertdjcashier/home)

Sanders, Rob, and Nabi Ali. *The Fighting Infantryman: The Story of Albert D. J. Cashier, Transgender Civil War Soldier*. New York: Little Bee Books, 2020.

## ★ ABOUT NINETEENTH-CENTURY LGBTQ+ AMERICANS ★

**The Library Company of Philadelphia:** [www.librarycompany.org/gayatlcp](http://www.librarycompany.org/gayatlcp)

**Connecticut History:** [www.connecticuthistory.org/the-lives-of-addie-brown-and-rebecca-primus-told-through-their-loving-letters](http://www.connecticuthistory.org/the-lives-of-addie-brown-and-rebecca-primus-told-through-their-loving-letters)

**Library of Congress: "A Complicated Case":** <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042331/1878-11-04/ed-1/seq-1/>

**Outhistory.org:** [www.outhistory.org/exhibits/show/aspectsofqueerexistence/intro](http://www.outhistory.org/exhibits/show/aspectsofqueerexistence/intro)

## ★ ABOUT BIPOC NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICANS ★

**American Battlefield Trust:**

[www.battlefields.org/learn/videos/black-soldiers-civil-war](http://www.battlefields.org/learn/videos/black-soldiers-civil-war)

[www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/black-confederates-truth-and-legend](http://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/black-confederates-truth-and-legend)

**Illinois.gov:** [www2.illinois.gov/dnrhistoric/Research/pages/afamhist.aspx](http://www2.illinois.gov/dnrhistoric/Research/pages/afamhist.aspx)

## ★ ABOUT THE CIVIL WAR ★

Horwitz, Tony. *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.

Lincoln, Abraham. *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works*. Edited by John G. Nicolay and John Hay. Arkose Press, 2015.

Sullivan, George, and Mathew B. Brady. *In the Wake of Battle: The Civil War Images of Mathew Brady*. Munich: Prestel Publishing Ltd., 2004.