

Book explores Buchanan's sexuality



Tom Balcerski, assistant professor of history at Eastern Connecticut State University, talks about his book, 'Bosom Friends: The Intimate World of James Buchanan and William Rufus King,' on Thursday. Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

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WILLIMANTIC — Citizens and political theorists alike have wondered when the United States will elect its first gay president.

But, according to some historians, America may have already elected its first gay president — 150 years ago.

Eastern Connecticut State University history professor Thomas Balcerski recently published a book investigating whether President James Buchanan may have been gay.

“Bosom Friends: The Intimate World of James Buchanan and William Rufus King,” was published earlier this month by Balcerski.

Balcerski is an assistant history professor specializing in American history.

He gave a lecture Thursday afternoon at Eastern's Science Building on his latest research.

“Why do Americans seem fixated on making Buchanan our first gay president?” Balcerski questioned. “In my talk today, as I do in the book, I

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answer these questions and set the record straight, so to speak, about the pair.”

Buchanan was elected president in 1856 and King was elected vice president in 1852 under Franklin Pierce.

The two lived intertwined personal and professional lives, going so far as to live together in boarding houses while remaining bachelors for life.

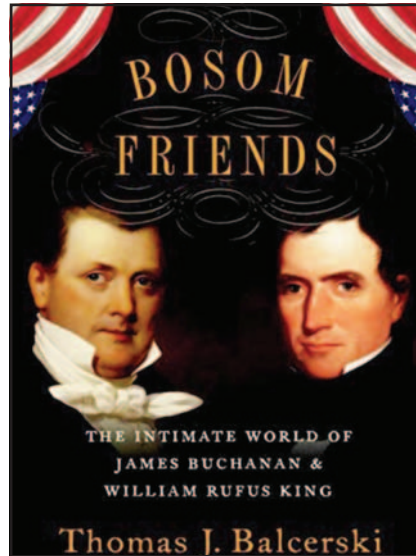
Around the nation's capital, the men were mocked in gossip and in political cartoons for their effeminacy and possibly their sexuality.

Critics went so far as to call them “Siamese twins” and “bosom friends.”

Through his intense research throughout the United States and even into London, Balcerski surmised Buchanan and King's relationship was intense, personal and intimate.

But, he said, likely not sexual in the way it may be viewed today.

“As bosom friends, they navigated the shoals of bachelorhood and American politics alike. They con-



‘Bosom Friends,’ by Eastern Connecticut State University assistant history professor Tom Balcerski, explores the relationship between President James Buchanan and William Rufus King. Courtesy of Amazon

fided and commiserated as messmates and transatlantic correspondents and, finally, they obtained the highest echelons of elected office,” Balcerski wrote in his epilogue. “In retrospect, their example helps to define the possibilities for male

intimacy in nineteenth-century America.”

Balcerski draws parallels to today's political realm.

In the 2000s, six congressman decided to live together in a row house on C Street in Washington.

According to Balcerski, the men were deeply intimate friends.

Balcerski also references an intimate relationship with two recent politicians, President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden.

The pair's jovial friendship has even been referred to as a “bro-mance,” a categorization Balcerski believes could also be applied to Buchanan and King.

“A generation of scholarship has uncovered numerous intimate and mostly platonic friendships among men,” Balcerski said.

“In the years before the Civil War, friendships among politicians provided an especially important way to bridge the chasm between the North and the South.”

“Bosom Friends” is available from Amazon and other booksellers.

Follow Claire Galvin on Twitter - @CGalvinTC.