Summary

As a well-documented way station on the underground railroad, the James C. and Lydia C. Fuller House satisfies Criterion A for its association with "events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history." The property meets the registration requirements established for Freedom Trail buildings associated with way stations in central New York (MPDF, Section F) and retains integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling, and association.

Several documented examples show the involvement of the Fullers with freedom seekers. In 1841, the Fullers hosted a family they had purchased from slavery. Also in 1841, James C. Fuller contributed $800 to purchase the Dawn Community near Chatham, Ontario, set up as a haven for freedom seekers, and he served on its first Board of Trustees. In 1843, Martha and David Wright sent a freedom seeker to the Fullers from Auburn. In 1851, after James C. Fuller's death, Lydia Fuller hosted Rev. Jermain Loguen when he fled Syracuse after the rescue of William "Jerry" Henry. When he returned to Syracuse in 1852, Loguen again stayed with Lydia Fuller. Two of the Fuller sons, Sumner and James, moved to Syracuse, where they, too, were involved with abolitionism and the underground railroad.

As a well-preserved and finely-detailed example of Federal architecture, the house also possesses "high artistic values" and satisfies Criterion C for nomination to the National Register because of its architectural distinction.

Discussion

James Canning Fuller, son of John Dorsett Long Fuller, a woolen draper, and Hannah Wilkinson Fuller, converted to Quakerism and married Lydia Charleton in the Bristol Monthly Meeting of Friends in England, on July 11, 1815. In the following years, they had six sons (Robert, Samuel, John, James, Bonville, Sumner) and one daughter (Hannah).. Looking for a place to raise their children, James C. Fuller came to the United States in 1833 to visit Friends in Skaneateles and to look for a farm. After his return to England, James wrote to Joseph Tallcott of Skaneateles that "I believe I saw sufficient to confirm me in the judgement [sic]that with my family, principally boys, the States hold out advantages for them which our native land does not." Other considerations, especially high taxes and slavery. also induced him to consider the move. In terms of tax reform, "all ends in smoke and disappointment." As for slavery, "the proposed ministerial plan is anything but satisfactory." In Skaneateles, Fuller looked at two farms, one of them owned by the widow of Nicholas Thorne. At $10,000, he considered the price too high, but he bought the Thorne estate shortly thereafter for $9500. The following spring, on board the Pacific, he brought his entire family from Liverpool to New York City and then to Skaneateles. (ancestry.com; Fuller to Tallcott, July 29, 1833; ship list; deed book 55, 483, deed dated October 6, 1824)

The Fullers were traditional Quakers, as revealed not only in their spiritual habits but also in their dress. Even after they moved to Skaneateles, theu continued to wear English Quaker dress, even more unusual than American Quaker garb. According to one observor, a friend of James and Lydia Fuller's daughter, "Mrs. Fuller's bonnet, it was said by the irreverent, might have been worshipped without any infraction of the Second Commandment, as it resembled nothing in heaven or earth," with "a cap of very fine net, very high in the crown, and very narrow in the border, which was always neatly crimped. She wore fawn-colored merino for every day, rich silk of the same tint for visiting or meeting, a small white shawl of washing-silk in cold weather; out of doors, a large gray shawl, or a fur lined cloak." James Fuller wore a "drab Quaker coat, which had no seam through the middle of the back, small clothes of the same color, buttoned at the knee with three buttons, and buckled shoes—never boots." (Mrs. Beachamp, 1933)

In England, Fuller had been an abolitionist. Traveling home from his first trip to the U.S., he remarked on the differing views of the passengers "on many subjects, particularly slavery, as there were six Southern State men, staunch advocates for slavery yet strange to say admitted its injustice and unrighteousness." Beginning in the late 1830s, James Canning Fuller took an active role in the emerging abolitionist movement in the U.S.. In 1838, he was secretary of the new Skaneateles Anti-Slavery Society, which sent anti-slavery petitions to Congress and adopted a resolution calling for immediate emancipation. (Skaneateles Columbian, February 7, 1838) In 1839, Fuller seconded an anti-slavery resolution

not, he said, "as a member of the Societies Friends [Society of Friends] but as a MAN." In October of that year, the Colored American noted that he had been appointed by the New York State Anti-Slavery Society as a delegate to the World Anti-Slavery Convention to be held in London in 1840. (Colored American, May 18, 1839, October 5, 1839)

Not everyone appreciated Fuller's abolitionist views. In 1839, he published a notice in the Skaneateles Columbian, giving "most sincere thanks to those friends who so kindly and voluntarily offered and preservingly conducted him to his home, when surrounded by a tumultuous mob Third day evening last; and he sincerely trusts that the mud and missiles which were so abundantly showered on the occasion may make both himself and friends more determined in the good cause." (April 18, 1839, quoted in Spain and Anklin, 61)

James C. Fuller did little to deflect hostility. Even his best friends sometimes found his personality abrasive. In a series of letters in 1841 and 1842, Gerrit Smith chided Fuller for his "egotistical and clamorous contention for the prevalence of his own peculiar views." "James C. Fuller," wrote Smith in the third person, "has talents, information, integrity & wealth capable of making him . . .the influential and useful man that he is. What does he lack? It is a strife-hating and a peace-love spirit." (Smith to Fuller, October 29, 1841) By spring, they had patched up their differences. Smith assured Fuller that "we will drop what is past, but let me assure you, that, for the future, I shall behave no better. If I see any thing in your temper or manner, which I think is wrong, I shall tell you of it. In other words, I shall be your friend. I shall not tattle about you, but I shall go straight to yourself with my complaint. And then, my dear James, I wish you to deal just as faithfully with me, for I have more faults than you have." (Smith to Fuller, March 5, 1842)

By 1839, the Fullers had acquired such a reputation for anti-slavery activism that, according to Franklin Chase, local historian, they were immediately suspected of hiding Harriet Powell, a freedom seeker who escaped from her Mississippi owners while they were visiting Syracuse. (Chase, ?)

The first well-documented case of the Fullers' underground railroad work came in 1841, when James C. Fuller went to Kentucky to purchase a man and wife and their five children. Lydia Fuller described the event in detail in a letter to her son Samuel, then in England:

> Thy father left for the South West (Kentucky) the same day thou embarked. Such a coincidence of circumstance was calculated to arouse thoughtfulness, & his safe return demands our gratitude. He was absent 26 days. Thou mayst remember the journey was anticipated, tho the object was not developed before thou left. Ann Fitzhugh, Gerritt's wife, & her brother each inherited a slave. The latter left for the South taking with him the man, & Ann consented the woman should accompany them, an attachment being formed between them. Fitzhugh became embarrassed & they were sold. By this time they have 5 children, one a poor weakly baby, 2 stout girls, the oldest about 14, very interesting, making themselves as free as tho they had long been inmates with us. One of them remarked she wishes more gravy to the chicken. Her mother said she might go down & fetch it, there was plenty below. Her reply was she would rather do without it than fetch it. The other two are boys. Ann Smith became uneasy in consenting to the woman's leaving & was very desirous to emancipate them. They father undertook this errand of humanity & succeeded in bringing them safely. The amount paid for them was 3500 dollars. (Lydia Fuller to Samuel Fuller, September 7, 1841. Punctuation added.)

This family was probably that of Samuel and Harriet Russell. Gerrit Smith wrote a letter to the Russells on October 1, 1841, explaining the terms of their new-found freedom. He would give them a small house to live in, rent-free until April 1, plus ten dollars. Then they were to get employment and be self-sustaining. By spring, Gerrit could report to James Fuller that "Samuel & his family are well, and they are highly esteemed by us & our neighbors." A daughter, Malvina Russell, stayed with the Smith household into the twentieth century. (Smith to Rusells, October 1, 1841; Smith to Fuller, March 5, 1842; Sernett, 169-71)

One of this family may be the same person that Lydia and James Fuller's daughter-in-law later met in Brooklyn, where "an old colored man" "was delighted to find one of the family to whom he owed his freedom." The story later appeared in a news article attributed to Mary Elizabeth Beauchamp, quoting Mrs. Blair.

> Long ago, in the days of slavery, Mr. Fuller, in one of his Southern trips, bought him and his family. Black people were not then allowed to ride in the same public conveyance with white men, and Mr. Fuller had to solve the problem. He was the man to do this. In his characteristic way he bought the stage coach, horses and all, and journeyed northward with his proteges. ("Early Quakers," 1933)

About this time, Fuller was also involved in raising money for the British American Institute of Science and Industry, to be established at the Dawn Community near Chatham, Ontario, a have for freedom seekers. As reported by Hiram Walker in a letter written to the Friend of Man in December 1841, Fuller gave $800 to this community and agreed to serve as one of the six members (three black and three white) of its first board of trustees. (printed January 11, 1842; Winks, 180)

In January 1843. Martha Wright wrote from Auburn, New York, to her sister, Lucretia Mott, in Philadelphia, about another freedom seeker who went to the Fullers' home. An African American man appeared in the Wright's kitchen with a note recommending him to the care of James C. Fuller and others of the "spiritually minded." In return for supper and a night's lodging on the settee in the kitchen, and fifty cents for a ride, he filled the furnace with wood before leaving, probably for the Fuller's house, the next morning. (Wright to Mott, January 11, 1843)

James Canning Fuller died on November 25, 1847. He was buried in the Quaker section of Lake View Cemetery, across the street from his house, on land that he himself had donated. Two years after his death, Frederick Douglass paid him high tribute. Coming to Skaneateles in 1849, Douglass noted that

> a large audience greeted me, and gave me a respectful hearing. Skaneateles has greatly improved in tone, on the subject of Slavery, since I visited that town, four years ago. It had the appearance of a real slave-holding town, in which the black man could not enter, without being assailed by thoughtless boys, and brutal young men, who seemed to take delight in manifesting disrespect and contempt, for what in sheer rudeness they called a nigger. We passed through the village this time, without meeting any of the usual marks of semi-barbarism, that formerly distinguished that town. Much of this change was wrought by that fast, faithful, and noble friend of the slave, now gone to his rest, James Canning Fuller, who in early anti-slavery times was several times mobbed on account of his abolition principles and practice. But he is now gone to his rest. It was sad to be there without his presence, to cheer and encourage me in the good work to which he was devoted; yet it was grateful, to perceive that what he achieved lived after him. (North Star, April 13, 1849)

Lydia Fuller continued the family's anti-slavery work. One neighbor remembered meeting Lucy Stone, abolitionist and woman's rights lecturer, at this house. George Thompson, British abolitionist and Member of Parliament, visited here on his lecture tour of the U.S. in 1851. (Beauchamp, 1933)

Lydia Fuller also continued to use the house on the underground railroad. Passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 mandated that U.S. marshals and commissioners assist in capturing accused fugitives. It also imposed stiff fines on those who helped freedom seekers escape. In 1851, abolitionists in Syracuse, including Dr. James Fuller, son of Lydia and James C. Fuller, successfully rescued a freedom seeker named William "Jerry" Henry and sent him to Kingston, Ontario. Fearing reprisals, many African Americans fled to Canada. One of these was Rev. Jermain Loguen, a freedom seeker from Tennessee who had settled with his wife and children in Syracuse. Loguen left his horse and carriage at the Fuller house, while Sumner Fuller, another son of James C. and Lydia Fuller, drove him west. In 1852, Loguen returned to Syracuse. Taking the train to Skaneateles Junction to retrieve his horse and carriage, he was noticed by two abolitionist women from Ithaca, who feared he would be arrested by police officers on board. They left the train at Auburn and sent a telegram to Syracuse, where abolitionists immediately rang church bells and met at the Congregational Church to plan a rescue. In fact, Loguen took the stage from the train station to the Fuller house, where friends found him peacefully eating dinner. (Hahn)

Lydia Fuller died on December 12, 1857. She was buried beside her husband in Lake View Cemetery. Her obituary noted that "she was a woman of strong and active mind, and excellent judgment, and exercised considerable influence in the society in which she moved; and her influence was always exerted for the welfare of the race and the elevation of humanity." (Skaneateles Democrat, December 16, 1857)

Local tradition suggests that the Fuller house had a "blind room" in the cellar, ostensibly to hide freedom seekers, but not such room has been found.

In addition to abolitionist visitors who came to see the Fullers, other famous people were also associated with this house. In 1824, General Lafayette drove by on his way back to New York City for his travels in the west. William E. Thorne, then a seven-year-old boy living in the house, remembered how they had put tallow candles in every window to welcome Lafayette as he passed by. Impressed by such a display, the General opened the door of the stage coach and waved his handkerchief at the family. (Thorne in Leslie, 184) In 1935, Eleanor Roosevelt also toured the house. ("Mrs. Roosevelt," 1935)

Because of its integrity as a Federal style home of the early nineteenth century (1815 and 1824), with the addition of an unusual two-story portico sometime between 1836 and 1848, this house also fits the requirements for nomination to the National Register under Criterion C.

Conclusion

The James C. and Lydia C. Fuller House fulfills the requirements for a well-documented site relating to the Freedom Trail in Central New York. Primary source evidence identifies several specific incidents relating to the participation of both James C. Fuller and Lydia C. Fuller in the Freedom Trail:

a. rescue of the Russell family from Kentucky in 1841.
b. contributions to the Dawn Community in Ontario in 1841.
c. freeedpm seeker sent from the Wright home in Auburn to the Fullers in 1843.
d. Jermain Loguen's stay at the Fuller home on his way to and from Canada in 1851 and 1852.

In addition, James C. Fuller was consistently involved with abolitionist organizing.

As a well-preserved example of Federal architecture, the house is also eligible for National Register listing for its architectural merit.

Using guidelines suggested in Historic Resources Related to the Freedom Trail, Abolitionism, and African American Life in Central New York, 1820-1870, (MPDF, Section H), the Fuller House is rated as a **five** for documentation relating to its use as a way station on the Freedom Trail and a **five** for integrity.