

*Property* Fuller, James C. and Lydia C., House  
*Location* Skaneateles, Onondaga County, New York

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**Description**

**A. Current Description**

The James C. and Lydia C. Fuller House is a remarkable example of a very well-preserved Federal-style structure. It stands west of the main downtown section of the Village of Skaneateles on Lot 13 in Block 19, on the north side of West Genesee Street, just opposite Lakeview Cemetery and east of Fuller Street. It is a five-bay house with a central doorway surrounded by sidelights and a fanlight. Delicate tracery imitates ovals, urns, and (in the center of the fanlight) lines of longitude. A portico with attenuated Tuscan columns fronts the doorway. A balustrade, unusual for this area, sits on top of the portico. Its vertical supports consist visually of three parts, gathered in the middle, perhaps imitating sheaves of grain, while urn-like turned decorations topping three posts (two at the corners and one in the middle).

On the west side, two quarter round windows are in the gable. On the east side, a two-story portico includes three slender columns with modified Ionic capitals and square bases, topped by a full pediment with a half-round window. From the east, the rear wing stretches north and retains what was probably its original five-bay façade. A porch was probably added in the twentieth century. Brick chimneys are at either end of the main structure. Windows are double sash with six-over-six panes. On the east, glass doors with three panes each open onto the portico. Foundations throughout are Onondaga limestone in a random ashlar pattern, punctuated with grills. The house is covered with 5-inch wooden clapboards.

Inside, floor boards are 6-inch to 8-inch white pine. Although the interior and part of the exterior back wing experienced significant changes in the 1870s or 1880s, much of the paneled woodwork, including doors, window panels in the front parlors, and woodwork in the hall and stairs, still remains inside. Foundations of a barn are visible in the back yard. The garage is under the house. (Tallman; HABS; conversation with Regina Hannan)

**B. Construction Chronology**

Like many buildings which appear at first glance to be all of one period, however, this one contains puzzles about its chronology. The first part of it, now the back wing, was probably constructed in 1815 for John Briggs, a Revolutionary War veteran. In 1817, Briggs sold the property to Harry and Clarinda Briggs (Book T, folio 112), who sold it to Nicholas Thorne in 1824 (Book EE, 83). According to E.N. Leslie, Thorne hired carpenters Peter Thompson and John Billing to build the front section of the house. After Thorne's death in 1832, James Canning Fuller, a British-born Quaker, bought the house and 156 acres in 1834 for \$9500 (Deed Book 55, 483). In 1836, Fuller published a Letter to the Farmers of Somerset in which he described his new farm, with its large house, barn, stables, cider house, sheep house, granary, wagon house, field barn, and workman's cottage. "I know of no farm within several miles of my late residence at Sidcot [County of Somerset, England] that would compare with it," he wrote.

There are about 30 acres of wood-land, and 10 to 12 of orchards of apple, peach, cherry, and plums. On the farm is the house in which we dwell, in front it is 48 feet, 6 inches; length of the hall, 51-1/2 feet, and 8 feet, 3 inches wide: parlor on each side of the entrance door, 18 feet, by 18 feet, 10 inches; another room, 18 feet, by 13 feet 6 inches; upstairs kitchen, 18 feet by 12 feet 8 inches; lower kitchen, 17 feet 8 inches, by 12 feet; cellar, with milk-house, and pantry, extending the length and breadth of the house; seven bed rooms on the second story, with good garret over; wood-house, adjoining the dwelling, 35 feet long, 28 feet, 9 inches wide; with floor level the first story of the house, so that firewood may be got for either kitchen, or parlour; without much, if any, exposure to the weather; and over the upper wood-house, a good chamber for keeping apples, or other fruit; a barn 39 feet by 30 feet, with four stables attached, and a large open shed; cider house, 42 feet by 28 feet, with mill and press; a large sheep house; a granary or corn house, with a waggon house &c. Field barn, 28 feet by 53 feet, one part of it an excellent stable; a cottage for a workman's residence. In my dwelling-house are 52 sash windows, 31 of them having green venetian folding blinds. (Fuller, 17)

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In 1836, James Fuller did not mention the two-story east portico, but it appeared in an 1848 drawing by William M. Beachamp. (Beachamp) Sometime during this period, they also installed stoves. As one young neighbor recalled, "The family tried for some years to keep up their English habits of living, in utterly changed surroundings, to their own discomfort. After shivering through many seasons, they gave in to the necessity of stoves, at a time when heating furnaces were unknown in our neighborhood." (Miss Beachamp, 1933) The Fullers also bought a second working farm, a mile-and-a-half from this one, of 137 acres. (Fuller, 18) The Fullers owned this house until Lydia Fuller died in 1857.

In 1861, James Allen Root purchased the house from Lydia Fuller's estate. He established a nursery there, and people began to call the house "Evergreen Manor." (Spain and Ankin, 129) A succession of families owned the house in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One or more of them made some changes in the building. In 1923, Carl Tallman noted that "extensive interior alterations, affecting also the exterior of the rear wing, were made about forty or fifty years ago [1870s or 1880s]." This may be the same time that the front porch was repaired, adding blocky capitals to the freestanding columns so they no longer match the engaged columns. (Tallman, 74)

In 1934, Carrie and Thomas Meacham invited the Historic American Building Survey to document the house (HABS NY 5-S-3). The west wing with French doors on the first floor may have been added in the 1940s. (Conversation with Regina Hannan.) John and Jean Marino operated a bed and breakfast in the house from 1989 until they sold it to John and Regina Hannan in 1996, who are restoring the house to its historic period. (Deed Book 4256, page 248; conversation with Regina Hannan)

While the Fullers originally purchased 156 acres of land with this property, the surrounding acreage has been gradually sold off for development. Today, the lot includes slightly more than one acre.