

Praise for *Walter Fuller*

Winnington's highly readable and carefully researched biography rescues from historical neglect both an intelligent, creative, versatile, and appealing figure, the well-connected yet self-effacing Walter Fuller, and his no-less-remarkable sisters. It also sheds fascinating light on a surprising variety of networks – those of student politics, journalism, theatre, musical performance, peace activism, socialist campaigning, and radio broadcasting – on both sides of the Atlantic during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Martin Ceadel, Professor of Politics, University of Oxford

Walter Fuller, though too little known today, left an indelible mark on the twentieth-century Atlantic world. We are fortunate indeed to have Peter Winnington's biography.

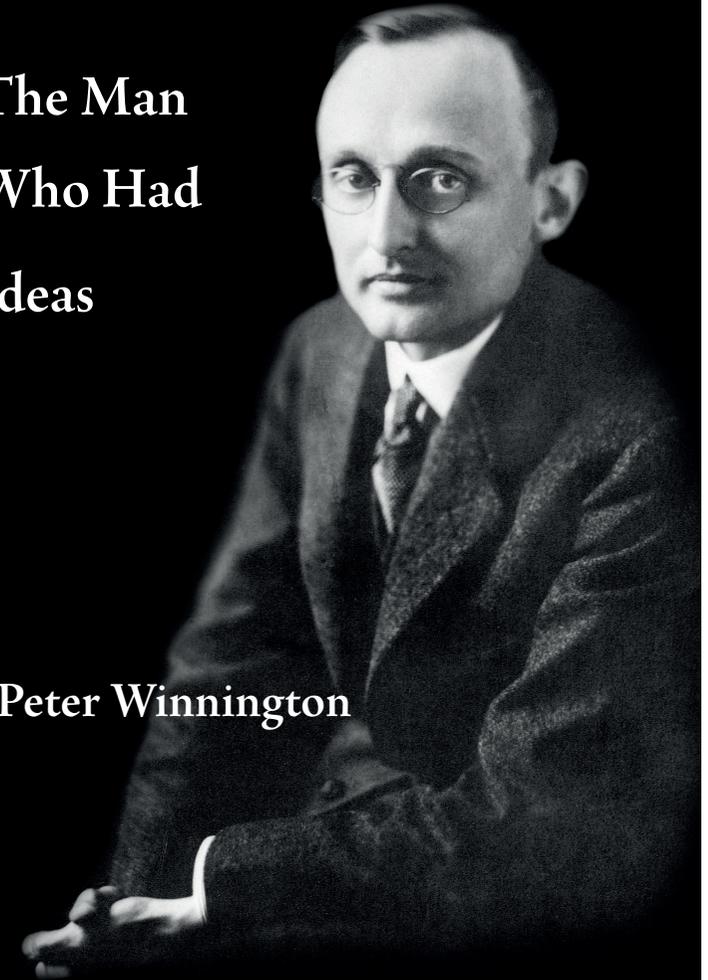
John Fabian Witt

Allen H. Duffy Class of 1960 Professor of Law, Yale Law School

# WALTER FULLER

The Man  
Who Had  
Ideas

G. Peter Winnington



WALTER FULLER

**Walter Fuller**  
the man who had ideas

G. Peter Winnington



*The Letterworth Press*

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Published in Switzerland by the Letterworth Press  
<http://www.TheLetterworthPress.org>

Printed by Lightning Source

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ISBN 978-2-9700654-2-5 (hard cover)  
978-2-9700654-3-2 (soft cover)

135798642

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of the publisher's website

<http://www.TheLetterworthPress.org/WalterFuller/index.html>

## Acknowledgements

For Carol Odell (1921–2013)  
who did her best to preserve  
the memory of the Fuller Sisters  
and their brother Walter

As this book is largely based on unpublished documents, it owes a great deal to the people who generously made them available to me. In particular, Carol Odell shared with me her transcriptions of many family letters in her possession. The words and drawings by her mother Dorothy Fuller are copyright her estate, represented by her executrix Jessica North. The words of Dorothy's sisters – Oriska (Riss) Ward, Rosalind(e) Fuller and Cynthia Dehn – are copyright their respective estates, represented by Conrad Dehn QC. The words of Walter Fuller and Crystal Eastman are copyright their grandchildren, represented by Anne Fuller and Rebecca Lesh (née Young). The words of Arthur Dakyns and the writings of his daughter Janine are copyright his son, Andrew Dakyns. The poem, 'Five Souls', and letter by W. N. (Trilby) Ewer are copyright Bidy Greene and Paddy Ewer. To each I address my sincere thanks for permission to quote.

I gratefully acknowledge the supply of pictures of Walter by Anne and Cordie Fuller, of Dorothy's drawings by Carol Odell, of Alice Boughton's photograph of the Fuller Sisters by one of Dorothy's granddaughters (who has declined to be named), and of Arnold Genthe's portrait of Crystal by the Library of Congress, and I thank them all for permitting me to reproduce them here.

Not in a lifetime could I have carried out this research without Google's search engine and the detailed finding aids to archived documents that libraries that have posted on the internet. (Britain lags behind both in preserving such documents and publishing indexes to them. More than once I was obliged to travel to England, or pay someone on the spot, simply to con-

sult an index or a list.) I am also grateful to the persons and institutions who have generously shared family histories, letters, and photographs by posting them on the net.

More specifically, I wish to thank the librarians and archivists who, time after time, patiently answered my questions, brought out dusty documents and copied them, or sent me microfilms. In the United States and Canada in particular, they have proved unfailingly helpful and willing to go out of their way to provide me with what I needed.\* For help and (where applicable) permission to quote from documents in their possession, I wish to thank the following (ordered by institution):

The Naval Historical Branch of the Ministry of Defence in the Admiralty Library at Portsmouth, England.

Carol Bowers, reference manager at the American Heritage Center at Laramie, Wyoming;

Linnea M. Anderson, Interim Archivist, Social Welfare History Archives, Archives and Special Collections, Elmer L. Andersen Library, Minneapolis;

Carol Stewart, senior library assistant, Special Collections at the Andersonian Library of the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow;

John B. Straw, director of the Archives & Special Collections Research Center, Bracken Library, Ball State University, Indiana;

Alison Clemens, Archivist; June Can, reader and access services; and Adrienne Sharpe, access services assistant, at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut;

Jeff Walden, archives researcher at the BBC Written Archives Centre, Reading;

Sarah Romkey, archivist of Rare Books and Special Collections University of British Columbia Library, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, Vancouver;

Jo Elsworth, keeper of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection, and her assistant Rachel Hassall;

\* One English library sent me a batch of photocopies so pale that at first I took them for blank paper. They refused to make a second attempt at copying them. 'The originals are in pencil,' they protested, as though copying machines could not be adjusted for contrast. Nor would they agree to a refund when I invoked the Sale of Goods Act, unreadable copies being clearly not 'fit for purpose'. That said, I should mention the kind librarian in Portsmouth who used his mobile phone to photograph documents that he was otherwise unable to copy.

customer services at the British Library;

Ben Gocker, Librarian for the Brooklyn Collection at Brooklyn Public Library, New York;

Frank Bowles, Superintendent, Manuscripts Reading Room, and Sarah Gresswell in the Manuscripts Department, Cambridge University Library;

Leslie Calmes, archivist at the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona at Tucson;

Alan King, Historical Collections Librarian, Central Library, Portsmouth;

Jane Muskett, Archivist at Chetham's Library, Manchester;

Kenneth Baxter, archives assistant at the University of Dundee, Scotland;

Chris Densmore, archivist of the William Isaac Hull Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania;

Tony Lees and his colleagues at the Greater Manchester County Record Office for access to the archives of the Co-operative Holidays Association (CHA) and to copies of *Comradeship*;

Danielle Sigler, associate director, Jean Cannon and Natalie Zelt, interns, at the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas at Austin;

Lesley Schoenfeld, access services coordinator, Special Collections, Harvard Law School Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts;

the staff at the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Houghton Library of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts;

Carol A. Leadenham, assistant archivist for reference at the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California;

James Peters, University Archivist, and the staff of the Document Supply Unit at the John Rylands University Library in Manchester;

Béatrice Bourgeois of the inter-library loan service at the University Library, Lausanne, Switzerland;

Florence Hayes at Library and Archives Canada;

Courtney Pruitt, Customer Service Section of the Library of Congress, Washington DC;

the director and research staff at the Lilly Library of the University of Indiana at Bloomington;

Sue Donnelly, archivist, and Silvia Gallotti, archives assistant, at the archives and rare books library of London School of Economics and Political Science;

Renu Barrett and Sheila Turcon, archivists, and Adele Petrovic, secretary for Research Collections in the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library, Hamilton, Canada;

Kristen Turner, special projects archivist at the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton, New Jersey;  
 Simon J. Roberts, secretary of the National Liberal Club, London;  
 Olive Geddes, senior curator in the manuscripts division of the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh;  
 the premium document supply service at New York Public Library;  
 the Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina;  
 Emily Lockhart, assistant archivist, Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio;  
 Sarah Hartwell, reading room supervisor at the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire;  
 Mark Pomeroy, Archivist at the Royal Academy of Art, London;  
 Dr Peter Horton, reference librarian, and Christopher Bornet, deputy librarian (archives) at the Royal College of Music, London;  
 Sarah Haylett, Heritage Services at the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB);  
 Geoffrey M. Danisher, Interlibrary Loan Librarian, Sarah Lawrence College Library, Bronxville, New York;  
 Lynda Leahy at the Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts;  
 Carolyn Troup at the Geddes collection, Strathclyde University Archives, Scotland;  
 Wendy E. Chmielewski, George R. Cooley Curator, and her staff at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania;  
 Jill Hughes at the Taylor Institution Library, Oxford;  
 Judith Vera, Territory Manager, Thompson Henry Limited;  
 Special Collections at University College London;  
 Prof. Steven Probst, and Judy Miller, Special Collections Librarian, Valparaiso University, Indiana;  
 Peta Webb, assistant librarian, at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, the English Folk Dance and Song Society;  
 Ian C. Jackson, the librarian of the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham, England;

Of the individuals whose help has been invaluable, foremost is Amy Aronson, a professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Fordham University, who is preparing a study of Crystal Eastman. She has been most generous with her time and in sharing information with me. My thanks also to the following people who helped me with information (on the topic indicated in

parentheses): Prof. Richard J. Aldrich (GCHQ); Prof. Harriet Alonso (the People's Council); C. J. Bearman (Cecil Sharp's diaries); David Briggs (Rosamond Impey and the Hankinsons); Sather Bruguière (Rosalind); Sam Brylawski (Victor gramophone recordings); Norma Bulman (research assistance); Prof. Peter Bunnell (Rosalind); Prof. Martin Ceadel (Norman Angell); Hugh Cobb (Vaughan Williams); Blanche Cook (Crystal Eastman); Ian Crutchley (Rosamond Impey): Tony Currie (*Radio Times*); Andrew Dakyns (Arthur Dakyns); Conrad Dehn (his mother Cynthia); Jim Enyearts (Francis Bruguière); Susan Figg (Hamilton Irving); Alain Frogley (Vaughan Williams); Cordie Fuller (her father Jeffrey; also feedback on a draft of this book); Darren Giddings (*Radio Times*); Josh Gosciak (Claude McKay); Robin Greer (*Readers' Review*); Cynthia Hall (genealogy); Prof. Miranda Hickman (Stanley Nott); Hilary Holt (the Dehns); Prof. Chris Hopkins (Caradoc Evans); John Impey (Rosamond Impey); Alison Ironside (Rosamond Impey); Peter Jones (Rosamond Impey); Jane Keefer (Folk Music Index); Elise Kirk (music at the White House); Prof. Sylvia Law (Crystal Eastman); Scott Ledbetter (illustration); Prof. Anne McCauley (Lance Sieveking); Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka (Kate O'Brien); Michael Morrison (John Barrymore); Adam Nott (his father Stanley Nott); Mairin Odle (research assistance); the Hon. Laura Ponsonby (Hubert Parry and Arthur Ponsonby); Prof. Jem Poster (Edward Thomas); Sue Powell (Stalbridge); Robin Rausch ('Five Souls'); Alan Ruston (Fred Hankinson); Prof. Jurg Schwyter (BBC English); Dr Robert Snape (CHA and NHRU); Karen Stoneman (Fuller genealogy); Prof. Paul Taylor (Stanley Nott); Hugo Vickers (Rosalind); Prof. Samuel Walker (ACLU); Eibhear Walshe (Kate O'Brien); Jan Ward (Leonard Stokes); David Williams (Jingo); Monica Wilson (her mother Cynthia); Prof. John Witt (ACLU); Lindy Woodhead (Harry Selfridge); Prof. Gregory Woods (Crocombe). My apologies to anyone I may have inadvertently omitted.

I thank the friends who read this book (or parts of it) at various stages in its development and patiently commented on it: Laurence Bristow-Smith (who pointed out my Gallicisms), Tanya Gardiner-Scott, Gerard Neill, and Professor Agnieszka Soltysik. Any defects the reader may find in the finished work are entirely my responsibility, not theirs.

I gratefully acknowledge a subsidy from the Société Académique Vaudoise for travel expenses and the purchase of books not available in Swiss libraries.

# Introduction

One cannot place one's hand on what Walter Fuller did; but one cherishes deeply all that he was; and one knows that deeds and achievements scatter like dust, whilst such a life leaves a permanent trace on every person it has touched.<sup>1</sup> *New Republic*

Walter Fuller's life went largely unrecorded; his name is unknown today. Yet what he did helped shape the world we live in. So this biography attempts to tell the story of his life, gathering up some of that long-dispersed dust, recording his deeds and achievements, and tracing some of the people he touched, in order to cherish anew all that he was.

His first achievement came at the end of his university studies: in 1904, he convened the first national assembly of British student councils, a stepping-stone on the road to the National Union of Students. In 1911, after editing periodicals in London for several years, he took three of his sisters to sing folksongs in New York, launching the revival that was to transform popular music in the twentieth century. When the Great War broke out in Europe, Americans looked on aghast. Numerous peace groups sought to prevent their country from joining the conflict. Walter supported them by introducing anti-war songs for his sisters to sing – the modern protest song – and by conceiving in 1916 a large anti-war exhibition that was shown in New York and other cities around the Union. In so doing, he pioneered in the art of propaganda. He edited small periodicals that denounced the suppression of civil rights and the appalling treatment of conscientious objectors.

After the war was over, he made New York's *Freeman* 'the best written and most brilliantly edited of the weeklies of protest,' characterized by its 'wit and vigor and lucidity.'<sup>2</sup> Then he returned to England, where he was recruited in the mid-1920s by the fledgling BBC for his ideas about the potential of broadcasting. There he developed the concept of the *corporate image*, which has had a lasting impact on how the BBC is perceived through-

out the world. After a brief stint directing the London (2LO) and Daventry (5XX) stations, he was chosen to edit the BBC's flagship publication, *Radio Times*, to which he gave a form that lasted fifty years.

These achievements went generally unrecognized, largely because Walter maintained a low profile throughout his life. His obituary in *The Times* makes little mention of his years in the United States. Instead, it underlines how

Walter Fuller belonged to the days of anonymous journalism. Few men can have handled more of the writings of others and, in his editorial capacity, have exercised more influence upon the ideas that the public receive, and yet have remained personally so little known. People who themselves were engaged in creative work of all sorts – writing, painting, designing, education, and all such forms of endeavour – knew him and respected the keen interest and comprehension that he possessed for all their spheres of activity, but he himself never published a book, and his own name hardly ever appeared in print.<sup>3</sup>

And when his name did appear in print, he seems to have told almost no one, so that his work colleagues and even his family remained unaware of his writing. While researching this book, I identified him as 'John Wessex', the author of *A Masque of the Seasons* (1911), and tracked down letters and articles that he contributed to periodicals. They proved too numerous for an appendix, so they are posted separately on the website that accompanies this book, <http://www.TheLetterworthPress.org/WalterFuller/index.html>.

Seeking what Walter Fuller wrote or edited has resulted in some surprises. One closely kept secret concerns the periodical, *Four Lights*, which was issued during 1917 by the New York branch of the Woman's Peace Party. Until now it has been celebrated as a exceptional magazine written and edited entirely by women. I have come to the iconoclastic conclusion that it was actually edited – and largely written – by Walter Fuller.

Besides modesty, Walter had another reason for not trumpeting his name. Throughout WWI, when he was living in the United States, he was a peace activist. From the moment that country entered the war, his activities were branded as sedition or treason; he risked a heavy fine and long years in prison. Yet he discreetly imported from Britain something that Americans have come to prize very highly: the concept of *civil liberties*. Ever since then, it has been – along with the older notion of *civil rights* – the most important principle for the protection of US citizens. It is upheld by the American Civil Liberties Union, which Walter's wife Crystal Eastman created with Roger Baldwin. The need for it today is as great as ever.

The sub-title of this book – 'the man who had ideas' – suggests another reason why Walter's name has remained unknown. Ideas carry no signature; once they are passed on, the identity of their originator is lost. Walter was 'always brimming with ideas, pulling them forth like newborn rabbits from his hat,' and he shared them liberally.<sup>4</sup> 'I suffer from ideas,' he complained.<sup>5</sup> One of his sisters noticed that his forehead even seemed to bulge with them. And he invariably had them well in advance of his time.

Walter got on well with people, and they found him kind, loyal, tender, generous (to a fault), and witty. For Llewellyn Powys, 'he had a heart of pure gold.'<sup>6</sup> (Has any other editor ever been qualified like this by one of his authors?) He was good at bringing people together. He introduced Van Wyck Brooks to Lewis Mumford, and the resulting literary friendship spanned four decades. He introduced the photographer Francis Bruguière to Lance Sieveking, the script editor and writer of the unique high modernist radio play, *Kaleidoscope* (1928), and they collaborated on avant garde art works.

Walter's personal qualities – and his ideas – captivated Crystal Eastman, a leading pacifist-feminist-socialist lawyer of the day in America – she co-authored the Equal Rights Amendment, for example. Her colourful reputation has overshadowed Walter's. When the history books mention him, he is identified simply as her second husband, a poet, or an artist. Although he sometimes penned a little ditty to entertain his sisters,\* he was by no means a poet. Nor did he draw or paint – but he had the soul and creative imagination of an artist. Along with *altruism*, the words that characterize his life are *imagination* and *enthusiasm*. This biography brings him out of the shadows.

Walter's life was intimately linked with the lives of his four younger sisters. He was their confidant, counsellor, coach, and critic, and for several years, during which he directed their singing in the United States, he was financially responsible for them. His philosophy contributed to their outlook on life, and the fifty-year stage career of his third sister, Rosalind, was one of its fruits. So in this account their stories are intermingled with his.

Telling these stories brings in a great many other people; a profusion of famous and not so famous figures – artists, writers, poets, actors, editors, and

\* Crossing the Atlantic in January 1913 with three of his sisters, Walter added a verse to John Masefield's famous poem, 'Cargoes':

Great German liners, ploughing the Atlantic,  
Caring less than nothing for the rough sea rollers;  
With a cargo of millionaires, stewards,  
Emigrants, European riff-raff, and four sick Fullers.

musicians – flit across the pages. Rest assured, though: if a person receives more than passing notice, you can be certain that they will return later in the book, revealing unfamiliar (and sometimes previously unrecorded) aspects of their lives. President Woodrow Wilson makes several personal appearances, along with his wife and daughters. The Right Honourable the Earl Russell never plays a leading part in the story, yet he manages to look in (as plain Bertrand Russell) in almost every chapter. Among the less famous names there is Jessie Holliday, whose portraits of leading socialists hang in the National Portrait Gallery in London, and her friend Kathleen Wheeler, the English sculptress who portrayed famous people and famous horses with equal skill. Here you will find more about them than in any other book. You will also discover that for many years the most respectable Sir Norman Angell, winner of the 1932 Nobel Peace Prize, enjoyed sex with Walter's sister Rosalind and denied it – 'cross my heart' – in his autobiography. Scott Fitzgerald had an affair with her during his engagement to Zelda; in fact, she inspired him with the story that financed his wedding. Here too you will learn how John Barrymore, playing Hamlet on Broadway, communicated to Ophelia that he wanted to make love with her after the show. And on it goes: Virginia Woolf mis-spells a person's name; T. S. Eliot gets stuck in the mud; Charlie Chaplin plays charades; and Cecil Sharp discovers three 'ludicrously lovely' girls – Walter's sisters, of course – who can sing folksongs better than anyone else.

All these people link up in hitherto unsuspected ways. For instance, in 1918 Bertrand Russell encouraged Rosalind to practise free love.\* Soon afterwards she was enjoying sex with the man who twelve years later fathered two children by Russell's wife Dora, precipitating their scandalous divorce. At the heart of this fascinating network of interconnected relationships, we find Walter and his sisters.

The many books, letters, archival documents and manuscripts† that I consulted are listed at the end of the book. Additional information is placed at the foot of the page, to be read or not, as you please.

*Mauborget, March 2014*

\* She adopted it as her way of life: 'free love is better than marriage,' she told *The Times* in 1968.<sup>7</sup>

† Unpublished documents have been left largely as written, rather than editorially improved. In quotations, the original British or American spelling has been retained, so both forms will be found. (Walter sometimes used US spellings in his letters to Crystal.)