Dr. Mary Walker

Dr. Mary Walker was the second woman in the U.S. to receive a medical degree, graduating from Syracuse Medical College in 1855. After the Civil War began in 1861, Dr. Walker applied for a commission as a surgeon in the Union Army but was denied because she was a woman. She chose to volunteer instead, becoming the first female surgeon in U.S. Army history.

Finding women’s fashions of that time impractical, Dr. Walker wore a Bloomer, or “reform” costume (a dress and trouser combination) as a uniform.

In 1865, Dr. Walker became the first (and only) female recipient of the Medal of Honor. When Dr. Walker’s Medal of Honor was rescinded in 1917 due to a change in eligibility requirements, she refused to surrender her medal and continued to wear it every day until her death in 1919. President Jimmy Carter restored her award in 1977.