

Amelia Bloomer

1818 - 1894



Known for her controversial advocacy of “dress reform” Amelia Bloomer was a serious suffragist and women’s rights activist.

“When you find a burden in belief or apparel, cast it off.”
Amelia Bloomer



Bloomers

Victorian women’s dress was uncomfortable and confining, seemingly designed to restrict activity. While not the designer, Amelia Bloomer became an advocate of billowy “Turkish” pantaloons that allowed greater movement. (They were worn under a loose fitting “below the knee” skirt.) Many suffragists adopted the style to widespread ridicule. Abandoning it, Susan B. Anthony said “I hoped to establish the principle of rational dress,” but “the attention of my audience was focused on my clothes instead of my words.”

Amelia Bloomer ALAMY



In the nineteenth century many thought that the “bloomer costume” was immodest. ALAMY



Elizabeth Smith Miller
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Designing Woman

Elizabeth Smith Miller designed the costume, being “thoroughly disgusted with the long skirt” when working in the garden. She was the daughter of wealthy abolitionist Gerrit Smith and a cousin of suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. A lifelong woman’s rights activist, she provided financial support for the movement and organized an annual speakers program that hosted Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Carrie Chapman Catt.

The Lily

The wife of an abolitionist editor in Seneca Falls, New York, Amelia Bloomer witnessed the first Women’s Rights Convention in 1848.

She published her own newspaper “*The Lily*” advocating temperance. (The effects of alcohol abuse on the family were an important concern for many activists.) Elizabeth Cady Stanton persuaded her to take a wider view, promoting suffrage and women’s issues generally. Amelia Bloomer’s advocacy of the “bloomer” costume increased circulation of *The Lily* and made her name a household word.



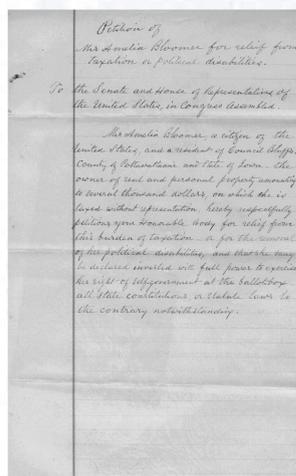
Masthead of *The Lily*. At first Elizabeth Cady Stanton thought that Amelia Bloomer was too conservative. Cady Stanton became an influence and a contributor to Bloomer’s newspaper pushing it toward themes of suffrage and women’s rights.



Cartoonists found an eager audience when satirizing the bloomer costume. Women in bloomers were portrayed as “mannish,” smoking cigars and pipes, or displaying aggressive “unladylike” behavior.



In 1851 Amelia Bloomer introduced Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Susan B. Anthony in Seneca Falls, New York. This historic meeting is commemorated by a statue which can be visited at the Women’s Rights National Historical Park.
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR



Women’s Suffrage petition. After moving to Council Bluffs, Iowa, Amelia Bloomer submitted this letter to the United States Congress in 1878 arguing that denial of women’s suffrage amounted to taxation without representation.
NATIONAL ARCHIVES