

Design a Dress for Mrs. Tom Thumb (Lavinia Warren Stratton)



Can you help us complete Lavinia's outfit?

Lavinia Warren Stratton was known to most people as "Mrs. Gen. Tom Thumb." Like her husband, she was a little person, and only grew to about 32 inches (81 cm) tall. Barnum promoted her as "The Queen of Beauty" because she was lovely, smart, and charming. She wore beautiful clothing as well!

The Barnum Museum has some of Lavinia's tiny garments, including the bodice, or top, of a gown. (See below.) It is made of tan color silk, has puffed sleeves, and it dates to around 1863 - 1864. There are clues that it was once decorated with velvet ribbon and lace. The skirt is also missing. It would have been floor-length and made of the same silk as the bodice.

Use the outline to the right to design an 1860s gown for Lavinia. But first, take a look at the Fashion Fact Sheet to learn more about styles in the early 1860s. You may get some ideas for your design!



Fashion Fact Sheet (for the *Design a Dress for Mrs. Tom Thumb* activity)

All women wore corsets and petticoats in the 1800s. You couldn't be properly dressed without them! When the hoop skirt (also called a cage crinoline) was invented in 1856, women no longer had to wear layers of petticoats because the "hoops" supported their big round skirts. Since Lavinia Warren was a little person, she wore miniature versions of these underpinnings, custom-made to her size.

The style of Lavinia's bodice, with its wide neckline and short sleeves, is a clue that it had been an evening gown or dinner gown, or may have been worn at the receptions she gave. Daytime dresses usually had longer sleeves with a neckline circling the base of the neck.

Just like today, colors and color combinations went in and out of fashion in the 1800s. Here are some of the popular colors worn in the 1860s:

Magenta (a rich purple-pink)
 Violet (a deep blue-purple)
 Lavender (pale violet)
 Mauve ("dusty" lavender-pink)
 Pink (soft to medium shades)

Emerald green (and lighter shades of emerald)
 Browns (medium shades)
 Blues (medium shades, dull or bright)
 White (with trims in a medium color)
 Trims in black, burgundy, purple, and cherry red were popular.



These gowns (and the fashion illustration) are in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. (All images are courtesy of the MMA)