

## Introduction

I wrote this post to help families learn more about one of the iconic items at the Smithsonian American History Museum- the ruby slippers. You can view the original post [here](#).

# Dorothy's Ruby Slippers: A Curious Tale of Magic, Mystery, and Mishap

One of the most beloved artifacts in the Smithsonian is Dorothy's ruby slippers from The Wizard of Oz (1939). Thousands of visitors approach the glass case each year to stare in awe at the bejeweled pumps as they sparkle under the lights.

But did you know the shoes aren't a matching pair? Or that other pairs exist? In fact, the shoes have a long, interesting history before appearing in the American History Museum.

## Ruby or Silver?

Dorothy's slippers play a key part in the Wizard of Oz movie. But if you've read the book, you'll know they weren't originally red. They were silver.

From the looks of the script, it seems like changing the color was a last-minute decision. Someone scribbled out the word "silver" and replaced it with "ruby". Why? Because they were going to film this movie in Technicolor, showing audiences the true magic of color film.

Including boring silver shoes like you could find in any black-and-white movie wouldn't help them do that. So, the shoe color changed and became the famous ruby slippers.

## The History

In the film industry, they make multiple versions of a costume for close-ups, replacements, and body doubles. The ruby slippers were no exception.

Costume designers made between six and ten pairs of slippers for Judy Garland and her double to wear for dancing, close-ups, and regular shots.

The shoes themselves are actually ready-made satin pumps bought from a department store. Costume designers dyed each pair red before hand sewing on bows and hundreds of red sequins to give them their characteristic shine.

The shoes Judy Garland wore for most shots also had orange felt glued on the bottom to help reduce the sound of her footsteps on the wooden sound stage. The shoes used for close-ups were the only pair that didn't have felt on the bottom.

## Where Are They Now?

So, what happened to the slippers after the movie finished filming?

Costumers shoved the shoes into a storage room at the studio and forgot about them. Then, a movie memorabilia "collector" discovered the shoes, keeping one pair and selling the rest. Over the years, the shoes kept changing hands, getting sold for thousands and even millions of dollars to private collectors.

In 2005, a museum in Judy Garland's hometown had a pair on display. Out of the blue, someone smashed the case and stole the shoes. They were lost for years until the FBI recovered them in 2017 thanks to an anonymous tip and a mysterious sting operation.

Four authentic pairs exist today, although it's possible others survived. A private collector owns one, and the FBI still has custody of the stolen pair. The other two are on display in museums on opposite ends of the country.

One is on display in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' museum in LA. The other, more famous pair sits in the Smithsonian's American History Museum in Washington, DC, donated by an anonymous donor.

A little-known fact about the Smithsonian's shoes is that they're mismatched. They're two different makes and sizes. Interestingly, the stolen pair of slippers contains the other halves. Which the Smithsonian learned when the FBI brought them the stolen pair to authenticate.

Today, you can see the slippers on display in the "Entertainment Nation" exhibit on the 3rd Floor of the American History Museum. Take your kids and appreciate everything the shoes went through to end up here.