

# Tulip Time History | A Tulip Time Tradition



Tulip Time had its beginning in 1927. Miss Rogers, who at that time was a High School biology instructor, suggested the planting of tulips as a civic project to beautify the city. The tulip was chosen because of the number of inhabitants who were of Dutch descent. In 1928, the city bought 100,000 imported bulbs and planted them in the parks and along the street curbs. This action brought about a revival of Miss Roger's idea and resulted in furthering the development of Tulip Time. Between 1928 and 1935 over a million and a half tulip bulbs were purchased and planted by the city.



Tulip Time was first announced to the world in 1929. An eight-day period beginning with the Saturday nearest the fifteenth of May was chosen as the official time to see the tulips in full bloom. The public response was overwhelming and by popular demand the event was repeated. Further organization resulted in the wearing of Dutch costumes and wooden shoes by the citizens. Other Netherlands customs and pageantry naturally followed to improve the program. The colors of the tulip blooms were enhanced by the bright hues of the old country dress.



Former wooden shoe carvers were reestablished in business and were kept busy all year forming their clumsy-appearing product from poplar logs. High School students were taught Dutch folk dances, and the klompity-klomp of hundreds of wooden shoes on the pavement has proved intensely interesting to festival visitors. Each year other attractions embodying the traditions of the Old Netherlands were added to improve the festival. By the time 1938 rolled around, the festival attendance had reached half a million and the tulip plantings were over three million.

It was decided at the close of Tulip Time in 1942 to suspend the festival until the end of the war. The flower show continued, however, and in 1946 the festival was reactivated. That year the city purchased enough imported bulbs to plant eight miles of tulip lanes.



Today, many residents of Holland don authentic Dutch dress with, of course, the traditional wooden shoes. Tulips abound and occasionally someone cannot resist the temptation to pluck a few blooms. While there is no specific tulip vandalism law on the books, tulips are covered in a city ordinance dating to 1955, stating that "no person shall destroy any flowers, plants, shrubs, etc." If the charge is filed as a misdemeanor, it is punishable to \$500 or 90 days. If it is charged as a civil infraction, it is punishable by a \$50 fine plus court costs. The determination is at the discretion of the judge. The city uses spikes imbedded along the tulip lanes to keep cars from driving up on the lanes to destroy the tulips.



The festival is officially opened when the Mayor and members of the Common Council, decked in the traditional robes of their office, inspect the city streets. The streets are declared dirty, after which brigades of costumed Hollanders begin scrubbing. The event has its roots in the well-known tradition of Dutch cleanliness. Frequently, the Dutchman had a well sunk in his front yard to make water readily available for washing the street, sidewalk and even the front of his house!

Back in Holland, Michigan, as soon as the streets are cleaned, the Town Crier announces, in the Dutch language, the beginning of another Tulip Time Festival. Each morning thereafter, the Klompen Dancers scrub the sidewalks in front of their business places at scheduled times, so the initial "scrubbing" activity becomes a daily custom during Tulip Time.

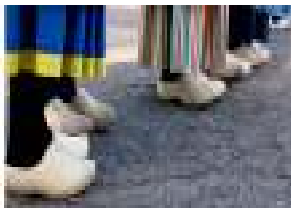
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During the eight-day festival, three parades take place. The first is the street-scrubbing parade, called the Volksparade. Brigades of costumed scrubbers hit the streets with pails swinging from shoulder yokes, splashing and scrubbing until the pavement shines. The second parade is the Children's Costume Parade, giving hundreds of area school children the opportunity to welcome our guests with colorful banners and signs depicting Holland's Dutch heritage. The marching children produce a contagious enthusiasm and great photo opportunities. The final parade is the Parade of Bands. This grand finale of the festival features over 50 bands and as many floats performing along a two mile route to the delight of young and old alike.



One of the most popular highlights of the famous Tulip Time celebration are the Klompen Dancers. Seven hundred student dancers and over seven hundred alumni dancers comprise the Dutch Dance Program. Beginning in January, teachers and students devote hours of their time to practice and the selection, fitting and approval of modified reproductions of authentic costumes from the following areas of the Netherlands, including Middleburg, Marken, Straphorst, Walcheren, Zeeland, Volendam, Vriesland, Urk, Achterhoek and Groningen. Dance routines and steps are adapted from the actual folk dances of old Holland. The Klompen Dancers wear about five pairs of socks in their shoes to protect their feet for performances. As for the history of Wooden shoes, the Dutch find their quaint footwear proves highly practical in the soggy polders, or fields, of the Netherlands. The art of the wooden shoe carver has been preserved here and you will find him at his work under the watchful eye of the visitors and see his shining knives transform poplar logs into shoes and shavings.



Special shows are held over the course of the festival, including plays, musical shows, dinner theaters, films on the Dutch pioneers, barbershop quartets and gospel celebrations. Many visitors partake of the traditional Dutch Lunch featuring pig-in-the-blankets and pea soup. Newer attractions include the "Kinderplaats" with children's entertainment and the Dutch Marktplaats.



There is much to see and do in Holland during Tulip Time. Must-see sites include: Windmill Island, where an authentic windmill transplanted from the Netherlands still grinds grain; Veldheer Tulip Farm, where visitors can walk among thirty acres of tulip beds and scenic gardens; Dutch Village Family Theme Park with its historic recreation of a Dutch community; and where wooden shoes are carved and displayed. The Holland Museum, housed in the old Holland Post Office, offers treasures from the Netherlands and information on the early settlement of Holland. The Cappon House provides tours of this restored home of a Dutch Immigrant who became Holland's first mayor. While in Holland, take in a flower show, quilt show, art show, or recital. Tour one of the area's historic churches or shop at the Holland Outlet Center with its Dutch-themed architecture.



Tulip Time today, while greatly expanded, still offers a taste of the Old Holland and its cherished Dutch heritage.

*Information provided by Herrick District Library (04/2010)*