

HISTORY OF THE CANADIAN TULIP FESTIVAL

A Celebration Founded on Friendship



The Canadian Tulip Festival has grown into the largest Tulip Festival in the world from a gift of thanks given five decades ago. In the fall of 1945, Princess Juliana of the Netherlands presented Ottawa with 100,000 tulip bulbs. The gift was given in appreciation of the safe haven which Holland's exiled royal family received during the Second World War and in recognition of the role which Canadian troops played in liberating the Netherlands.

The tulips have become an important symbol of international friendship and the beauty of spring. They also have special meaning to people of Canada's Capital Region. During the war, the Dutch royal family was hosted at Government House in Ottawa. Princess Margriet was born at the Ottawa Civic Hospital. The floral gift that began in 1945 has established this region as the Tulip Capital of North America.

A few years after the Dutch tulips arrived in 1945, they became a strong attraction. Stunning pictures were appearing in newspapers nation wide. More and more events began to centre around the annual bloom of tulips.

The first Canadian Tulip Festival was held in 1953. The Ottawa Board of Trade, at the suggestion of world-renowned photographer Malak Karsh whose photographs have immortalized the tulip, formalized the Canadian Tulip Festival to coincide with the tulip's annual bloom. In the next 10 years the Festival grew in size, with a staggering display of over two million flowers.

Here are some highlights from the event's proud history

- Prime Minister John Diefenbaker presides over the Opening Ceremonies (1958).
- Prime Minister Diefenbaker, Governor-General Vanier and U.S. President John F. Kennedy meet for talks during Tulip Month (1961).
- Queen Juliana of the Netherlands makes a royal visit to the Festival for its 15th Anniversary (1967).
- Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau cuts the opening tulip ribbon while chewing on the stem of a golden melody tulip (1968).
- Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the liberation of Holland, Dutch Canadians give Canada a 1500-pipe concert organ (1970).
- Liberace opens the Festival with a piano concert (1972).

- Tiny Tim tip toes through the tulips (1984).
- Twelve-year-old Alanis Morissette debuts in her first stage appearance at the Canadian Tulip Festival (1987).
- Governor-General Ramon Hnatyshyn opens the Festival (1992).
- A Tournament of Roses float from Pasadena, California featuring the Rose Queen joins the Rideau Canal Flotilla (1993).
- A Tribute to the Origin Country of the Tulip – Turkey (1994).
- Princess Margriet of the Netherlands returns to Ottawa to officially open the Festival which celebrates the good relations between her country and Canada through the twin themes of "The Friendship That Flowered" and the 50th Anniversary of the liberation of Holland (1995).
- The Canadian Tulip Festival's Floral Tribute To Nice and its Bataille de fleurs, the granddaddy of all floral celebrations (1996).
- Canadian Tulip Festival celebrated the floral artistry of Japan with a spotlight on the Festival's friendship partner, the Tonami Tulip Fair (1997).
- A Celebration of Canada's Provinces & Territories shared the gifts of the tulip and friendship with all of Canada. Entertainment from 27 festivals from across Canada was featured at the Canadian Tulip Festival (1998).
- "Between Friends", a celebration of the unique friendship between the United States and Canada, twinning with the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival, was one of the most successful festivals ever (1999).
- Tulips 2000 — A Capital Celebration! was a special millennium floral showcase of floral designers from 20 capital cities around the world and featured the blooming of over two million additional tulips planted as part of the Millennium Tulip Challenge (2000).
- Tulips Forever! A salute to Britain, was a celebration of Britain's tulip history and world-renowned gardens. It featured a Tulip Twinning Ceremony between the Canadian Tulip Festival and the Spalding Flower Parade, Britain's largest tulip festival (2001).
- Tulipmania! Tulips like you've never seen them before. The Canadian Tulip Festival celebrated its 50th Anniversary with the creation of Tulipmania throughout the new Cities of Ottawa and Gatineau (2002).

The Canadian Tulip Festival is a 50-year tradition attended by people from throughout North America, Europe and Asia. The event, which grew from a Dutch gift of friendship, has become the world's largest Tulip Festival and Canada's most colourful event.

