

# Tulipmania

Tulips can be traced back before written records as they were used to decorate ancient artifacts. There is evidence that Egyptians knew of crocus in 2650 B.C. Primitive civilizations valued bulbs for food, medicine, flavorings, dyes, cosmetics and perfume. A Greek philosopher and a Greek physician made the first known written records of bulbs in 300 B.C. Tulips originated in the Mediterranean climate - cool wet winters and hot dry summers. Different species came from southern Europe, Turkey, Iran and central Asia. These countries have favorable soils, altitude, temperatures and rainfall for the growth of tulips. Tulips can withstand cold, wet winters but not rainy summers.

The botanist, Carolus Clusius, is credited for bringing tulips to Holland. He had been the curator of the vast medicinal gardens in Vienna, Austria until he moved to Leiden, Holland, to remove himself from religious persecution. He brought his collection of bulbs with him, planting them in the gardens of the university where he took a position. People were captivated by the beautiful flowers but Clusius was unwilling to sell them because he was studying them for possible medicinal properties. As a consequence, the bulbs were stolen from the ground.

It was not long before the Dutch were obsessed with owning and growing tulips. At first, only the wealthy owned tulips and ownership soon became a status symbol. But the common people saw the profit that was being made from raising and hybridizing tulips, and they also entered the tulip business. Every little patch of front yard became growing space for valuable tulip bulbs. Because the demand for bulbs became so great and the supply of bulbs was very small, the prices escalated at a rapid rate. Bulbs were traded like stocks, sight unseen, and valuable merchandise and holdings were traded for bulbs. A single bulb that was still growing in the ground could be traded for livestock, jewels, businesses and small fortunes. However, by 1637, the market was overloaded with people wanting to sell and no one wanting to buy. This market crash all but destroyed the Dutch economy, saved only by the intervention of the government. Investors were lucky to recover five cents on the dollar.

News of the crash spread quickly throughout the world and soon there were many people curious and interested in these beautiful flowers. Soon the flower was popular world-wide, thus putting the Dutch in a good position as the grower and supplier of the world market for tulips.

