



Sept 13 is Harbor Day: New Yorkers and Dutch celebrate 400 years of peace, love, and bicycles

By NY Bicycle Transportation Examiner, Meredith Sladek



Photo via [ecovelo](#)

When Dutch sailor [Henry Hudson](#) sailed on the Half Moon in 1609, he was, like many oceanic navigators of the day, looking for an eastern trade route to Asia. Plagued by ice on his original route, a detour led him up the river that now bears his name as he became the inadvertent father of modern-day New York City—a place he described as “far more fabulous” than his prior destination.

Like any proud parents, the Netherlands rejoiced as the New Amsterdam colony was founded and the fur trade established; they waved good-bye when it was ceded to the English in a treaty, and they watched it prosper as a financial and cultural mecca when the United States declared independence. The city has not forgotten its Dutch roots, however, evidenced anywhere from [Park Avenue's annual tulip blossoms](#) to early canals to names such as Brooklyn (Breukelen), Harlem (Haarlem), and Amsterdam Avenue.

On April 30—Queen's Day in the Netherlands, which is essentially their independence day—the [Dutch bestowed upon New York City an early birthday gift of 200 orange bicycles](#) as a symbol of 400 years of peace and friendship, as well as a shared cultural vision for the present and the future. These [Batavus](#) cruisers also represent the Netherlands' love of the cycle, as it is the only country in the world that has more bicycles than people: an average of 1.1 per citizen.

They have been rented out for free rides to the public on Governor's Island for the entire summer, and showcased at special events. An orange cycle from this fleet was delivered to the White House a month ago. Two were presented to Prince Willem-Alexander of Orange and his wife Princess Maxima, the current Dutch royal family, whose [weeklong visit as Dutch ambassadors](#) began this past

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Tuesday at the site of the Intrepid on the Hudson River.

However, just as our city started small, these bicycles too had a humble origin. Delivered to a large shed in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the bikes were assembled by hand in a matter of days by [Bike and Roll](#) mechanics Pete Lang and Evan Bender, and thoroughly tuned up throughout the summer season for ideal safety and function. They arrived in Manhattan via water taxi, and will be donated to [Recycle-a-Bicycle](#) after festivities cease.

The Dutch bikes are comfortable, sturdy, and superb for commuting. They come complete with a rack, fenders, bell, and chain guard, and are available in a variety of sizes, including childrens'. As cycle commuting gains popularity in New York city, it is hoped that this "shared vision" for the cities includes a greater appreciation for and integration of the bicycle as a common mode of transportation.

The gift is part of the [NY400](#), a series of festivities planned for the anniversary, culminating on [Harbor Day](#), September 13. Harbor Day activities are held on six waterfront locations--The Battery, Battery Park City, Hudson River Park, Governors Island, Brooklyn Bridge Park, and Snug Harbor (Staten Island). Free rentals of the NY400 fleet are available at every location, as well as food, drink, entertainment, and activities.



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