

# LICENSE PLATES

by  
Mike Prero

The earliest plates were made of porcelain baked onto iron or ceramic with no backing, which made them fragile and impractical. Few of these early plates survived. Later experimental materials include cardboard, leather, plastic, and, during wartime shortages, copper and pressed soybeans (Louisiana eventually stopped using the latter due to goats eating them!).

France was the first country to introduce the registration plate with the passage of the Paris Police Ordinance on August 14, 1893, followed by Germany in 1896. The Netherlands was the first country to introduce a national registration plate, called a "driving permit", in 1898. Initially these plates were just sequentially numbered, starting at 1, but this was changed in 1906.

In the U.S., where each state issues plates, New York State has required plates since 1903 (black numerals on a white background) after first requiring in 1901 only that the owner's initials be clearly visible on the back of the vehicle. At first, plates were not government-issued in most jurisdictions and motorists were obliged to make their own. In 1903, Massachusetts was the first state to issue plates.

In 1956, all North American passenger vehicle registration plates, except for French-controlled St. Pierre and Miquelon, were standardized at a size of 6 in × 12 in, although a smaller size is used for certain vehicle classes, such as motorcycles, and for the state of Delaware's historic alternate black and white plates, which are 5.25 in × 9.5 in. [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vehicle\\_registration\\_plate#History](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vehicle_registration_plate#History)]



The very first state-issued plate in Massachusetts simply read "1", and was issued to Frederick Tudor. A member of his family still holds the active registration on the plate today, 113 years later.

Don't know of anyone collecting the covers, and there's no listing.

