

# **Early New Mexico License Plates**

**Fifth Edition**

**by  
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# Introduction

This publication came about through a need to more thoroughly and accurately document the history of early New Mexico license plates. There has been a considerable amount of inaccurate information, and misinformation, published on the subject over the years, primarily through a failure to check and credit original sources. And the truth be told, I have been as guilty as the next person in that respect. It was the meticulous work of Eric Tanner, Archivist for the Automobile License Plate Collectors Association (ALPCA), that made this clear and served as a model for future research. In the final production phase, Eric's proofreading skills were invaluable to ensuring clarity and accuracy of the text.

The information presented here is an effort to clean up the somewhat untidy trail left in the past. Some of what appears here was unearthed by Eric himself. A great deal of the rest was found by following up on specific leads that Eric developed by virtue of his keen insight into the nature of historical records in general. And an important part of this new effort is that specific citations are given for the original sources for all important facts. Furthermore, these are all sources which the reader can go to, and read directly from the originals.

Coming up with accurate and complete information, however, is no easy task. New Mexico has a checkered history with respect to preservation of its historic documents, and its motor vehicle registration records are no exception. The State Archives has records from a few early years in its holdings, but many years are not present. And even the records that do exist are difficult to find and access, as the archivists who knew where all these disparate things were filed have long since retired.

I began building my own archives in the early 1970s, a process which continues to this day. These files include original motor vehicle registration books acquired through antiquarian booksellers and other sources, as well as photocopies purchased from various government agencies, but there is much that is still unfound.

If you have any early New Mexico motor vehicle registration books, photographs or other similar material that you would like to donate or sell, please contact us. And if you find errors or omissions, please pass along complete details and corresponding documentation so corrections can be incorporated into future editions.

## **Introduction to Photographs and Illustrations**

Except where otherwise credited, all photos are by the author. The vast majority of the license plates illustrated are from the collections of the author, Wayland Hill and Michael Wiener.

Production of the 168 pages of color photographs posed a dilemma which was solved by Latana Jan Bernier, who not only suggested the method to get them in a form suitable for the printer, but did almost all of the work herself on the First Edition. This was no small task, considering that there are now well over two thousand photos which make up these pages.

The license plates illustrated herein were selected to convey what might typically be seen as-found, or in the hands of collectors. Any given plate shown, therefore, is not necessarily the best known example of a particular year and type of plate, but was chosen because of the aforementioned criteria, and its availability to be photographed. Nor, for that matter, is every year of every type of plate illustrated. In some cases examples for those years are simply not known to exist, and in other cases plates were not available to be photographed.

In those instances where the statement is made that a particular year and type of plate “is not known to exist,” it means that the cited example is not known to the author. There may be other persons who do know of such plates.

Should you have license plates which you think would better illustrate particular examples, or would represent years not included here, and would like to see them showcased in future editions, please feel free to submit photographs of them. Photos should be of the highest possible resolution, in JPG format, set to a minimum resolution of 300 dpi. All plates (including white plates) should be photographed on a white background (white mat board works nicely), under excellent lighting conditions for accurate reproduction of colors, with the camera mounted on a tripod and facing square to the license plate. A cable or wireless shutter release will eliminate the possibility of camera shake. If you do not have suitable camera equipment, it might be possible for us to make arrangements to have the photos taken for you.

### **Contact information**

If you do have any early New Mexico motor vehicle registration books, other similar material, or photographs you would like to submit, the author can be contacted at:

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## **Abbreviations used in Acknowledgments list**

ALPCA	Automobile License Plate Collectors Association
ENMU	Eastern New Mexico University
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
NMDGF	New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
NMHU	New Mexico Highlands University
NMMVD	New Mexico Motor Vehicle Division
NMSP	New Mexico State Police
NMSRCA	New Mexico State Records Center and Archives
NMSU	New Mexico State University
NMT	New Mexico Tech University
UNM	University of New Mexico

## **NMplates.com Website**

Early in 2017 the [www.NMplates.com](http://www.NMplates.com) website went live as a companion to this book. Even though there are more than 2,100 photographs in the book, the website has allowed us to further expand the photographic coverage of New Mexico's colorful license plate history. As of 2020 the website is providing its users direct access to well over 4,200 photos, with more being added almost daily. No membership is required and there are no charges or subscription fees to use the NMplates.com website.

Another advantage of the website is that photographs there can be easily magnified. If you're viewing NMplates.com on touch screen devices such as an iPad or a smartphone, you can enlarge photos simply by stretching the images with your fingers, just as you would any other image. In doing so, any of our typical license plate photos can be enlarged to fill an entire iPad screen without noticeable degradation of image quality.

When using a PC, whether it be a Windows or Apple machine, enlargement is done by using either your browser's zoom tool, or through a shortcut that works on many, if not most browsers.

Do this by holding down the CTRL key and pressing the + key while viewing the page of interest. Each press of this key will incrementally enlarge the photos currently on the screen. As in the case of the enlargement method using the zoom tool, you may have to scroll the screen left or right, and/or up or down, to center the photo(s) of interest on your monitor. To return to the original zoom level, hold down the CTRL key and successively press the - (minus) key until you reach the zoom level you want.



# How to Use this Book

This publication has been designed as a reference work much like an encyclopedia, and is arranged in six principal sections:

**How to Use this Book:** The section you're reading now.

**License Plate Types:** A series of chapters devoted to each of the various types of license plates issued from 1912 to the present time. The chapters are arranged in alphabetical order by type.

**License Plate Administration:** Individual chapters chronicling the commercial companies which manufactured New Mexico's plates, the early laws governing motor vehicles, allocation and distribution of license plates to the counties, and providing statistical tables showing the numbers of various types of vehicles registered in New Mexico each year from 1900 to 2014.

**Miscellany:** New Mexico license plates and related items which do not readily fall within the categories covered by the preceding chapters.

**Modern Plates:** New Mexico license plates issued after 1955, and which therefore do not fall within the definition of "early" plates, including the many specialty plates introduced in the 1970s and later.

**Index:** A comprehensive subject index with well over 1,800 page references to facilitate locating a particular subject when the applicable chapter is not known.

The encyclopedia-style arrangement makes it easy to quickly look up a particular area of interest, or a particular license plate type—down to and including specific years of plates of each given type. If one wishes to explore the evolution of New Mexico's license plates chronologically, the section later in this chapter entitled "Chronology of Key Events" provides just such a time line. Additionally, reading the chapters on "First Automobile in New Mexico," "Pre-states," "First Issues" and "Passenger" in that order will provide an excellent and comprehensive historical overview.

All chapters in turn provide references to pertinent legislation and administrative procedures which bear on the various license plates issued by the state over time. All of this information is covered in complete detail in the third section of the book, where even the early motor vehicle laws are reproduced in full for the convenience of the reader.

As you have already seen, the title of this book is *Early New Mexico License Plates*. For our purposes, the word “Early” refers to plates issued from the Territorial period through 1955, and it is these early years which are the focus of this book. Except for a general overview, we purposely do not address “modern” plates in great detail. Notable exceptions are Amateur Radio, Highway Department, and certain Motorcycle varieties—types which are either not well known, or are poorly understood. However, for certain plates which have broad general interest (passenger and truck tags being prime examples), we do document key milestones of the post-1955 (i.e., “modern”) era. Photographic coverage of a number of types also extends well beyond 1955.

And to satisfy the need to recognize and identify plates of the modern era, a separate chapter on “Modern Plates” is included toward the end of the book. There you will find descriptions of well over a hundred types of such plates, along with color photographs of most of those described.

The reader will find occasional instances of certain information appearing in more than one chapter. This has been done intentionally in order to treat subjects as thoroughly as possible in each of their respective chapters so that it is not necessary to continually refer to other portions of the publication.

A fact of life is that there is no limit to the amount of minutia that could be explored, particularly with respect to such things as die and stamping variations within given years, and we do discuss some of the more interesting aspects. But for the most part we stick to information which has a broader application.

To assist in navigating the book, the chapter number, chapter title and chapter page number are included at the bottom of each page (excepting the photo pages, which are incorporated at the end of each respective chapter and are not individually numbered.) The comprehensive subject index at the end of the book facilitates locating a particular subject when the applicable chapter is not known.

The chronology begins on the next page, and runs from 1910 (during the Territorial period) to the present time. It will be found to be useful guide in identifying topics for further reading

# **Chronology of Key Events in New Mexico License Plate History**

As the chapter heading implies, what follows is a chronological list of key milestones in New Mexico's license plate history. It is not intended to be all-inclusive. Rather, it provides a general overview of some of the more important motor vehicle registration and licensing events which have taken place over the past century. The subject index at the end of the book will point the reader to detailed discussions of all of these topics, and much more.

- 1910** – Although the Territorial government never required the licensing of motor vehicles, Albuquerque, Las Vegas and Santa Fe do so independently beginning in 1910.
- 1911** – Raton becomes the fourth and last municipal jurisdiction to require licensing of motor vehicles.
- 1912** – New Mexico is admitted to the Union as the 47th state and begins issuing undated green-on-white license plates to automobiles only. Each vehicle receives a single plate, to be attached to the rear of the car. Louis C. Ilfeld, a wealthy businessman in Las Vegas, receives plate # 1 for his Velie automobile. By year's end, 904 plates have been issued.
- 1913** – The same undated green-on-white plates continue to be issued to cars, picking up with plate # 905 on January 2. Effective March 15, trucks and motorcycles must be registered, too. Trucks receive the same plates as cars, while motorcycles receive small vertically-oriented plates. By the end of the year 1,898 of the generic 1912-1913 car/truck plates have been issued.
- 1913** – Also effective March 15, automobile dealerships are required to be licensed, but only 23 dealer license plates are issued in this first year.
- 1913** – The state prohibits redundant municipal licensing of motor vehicles.
- 1914** – License plates are dated for the first time. Colors are changed to white on green, and will change again virtually every year for the next fifty years. Not until the 1960s will color changes become less frequent.

- 1915** – Total motor vehicle registrations exceed 5,000.
- 1920** – Porcelain-coated license plates are introduced with the idea of saving money by using them for five years. In 1921 through 1924, they are to be revalidated by attachment of a small colored metal seal, or tab, the equivalent of today's renewal stickers.
- 1920** – The porcelain plates issued to motorcycles are curved so that they will match the shape of the rear fender. The idea is that they will fit snugly, like a glove, over the fender.
- 1921** – A red diamond-shaped metal seal is attached to the 1920 porcelain plates to validate them for 1921.
- 1922** – A silver octagon-shaped metal seal is attached to the 1920 porcelain plates to validate them for 1922.
- 1922** – Total motor vehicle registrations exceed 25,000.
- 1923** – A yellow 6-pointed star-shaped metal seal is attached to the 1920 porcelain plates to validate them for 1923.
- 1923** – At mid-year the New Mexico State Highway Department is the first state agency to receive unique license plates. These are porcelain plates, in use for only six months.
- 1923** – Also at mid-year, and for the first time, certain commercial vehicles, including both cars and trucks, receive unique license plates. These are standard embossed steel plates, rather than porcelain.
- 1923** – Although they do not have motors, registration is required for trailers beginning with the 1924 registration year, which receive small motorcycle-size license plates. A decade later these will be enlarged to the size of car plates.
- 1924** – One year earlier than originally planned, porcelain plates are removed from service because law enforcement officials found it too difficult to ascertain whether the revalidation seals on the plates were current. The state reverts to standard embossed steel plates, and for the first time issues two plates to each car and truck—one for the front and one for the back.

- 1924** – Motorcycle license plates are switched from the vertical format that had been in use for over a decade, to the horizontal format that continues to be used today.
- 1924** – For the first time, the Governor is given plate #1, the number which Louis Ilfeld had held since 1912. The recipient is Governor James E. Hinkle, a Democrat.
- 1925** – Experience the prior year showed that some people with two cars would register only one of them, and use one of the two issued plates on each car. To combat the chiselers the words “FRONT” and “REAR,” respectively, are embossed on the two 1925 plates.
- 1926** – The “FRONT” and “REAR” designations on the plates are dropped after just one year of use.
- 1926** – Total motor vehicle registrations exceed 50,000.
- 1927** – The Zia sun symbol appears on New Mexico license plates for the first time, with the two-digit year appearing inside the Zia. Also for the first time, the state name is spelled out in full, rather than being abbreviated.
- 1928** – The Governor’s license plate is made distinctive by embossing the word “GOVERNOR” at the top. The plate bears number “1” and the recipient is Republican Governor Richard C. Dillon.
- 1928** – Vehicles operated within New Mexico by Federal government agencies are provided OFFICIAL plates whose plate numbers include the letters “U.S.”
- 1929** – Vehicles owned by the various city, county, and state agencies begin receiving license plates embossed with the word “OFFICIAL.”
- 1929** – Total motor vehicle registrations pass 75,000.
- 1930** – Non-commercial trucks such as those owned by farmers and other individuals receive unique plates for the first time. The word “TRUCK” is embossed on the plate.
- 1931** – No later than this year, the state began issuing specially designated plates for “Driverless Cars.” This contradictory sounding name was the term generally used for rental cars in the 1920s and 1930s.

- 1932** – Long before the concept of “The Land of Enchantment” was thought up, New Mexico had for many years billed itself as the “Sunshine State” as an attraction to potential tourists, though 1932 was the only year that this slogan is placed on its license plates. The phrase Land of Enchantment didn’t appear on her plates until 1941, and Florida, formerly the “Citrus State,” didn’t pick up New Mexico’s discarded Sunshine State slogan until 1949.
- 1932** – Until the late 1930s many states did not unequivocally honor the license plates of vehicles from other states. Initially, New Mexico, required visitors to buy a license plate after being in state just sixty days. By 1932 the grace period had been extended to six months, and a special souvenir Guest, or “GST” license plate can be purchased by out-of-state’ers at a cost of one dollar.
- 1932** – Special plates are made available to commissioned officers in the New Mexico National Guard.
- 1933** – At the urging of Governor Arthur Seligman, New Mexico’s first state-wide highway patrol is established under the name New Mexico Motor Patrol as an all-motorcycle force with just ten officers. Regular civilian license plates were issued to the Motor Patrol’s Harley-Davidson police motorcycles.
- 1933** – Beginning with the first plates issued under statehood, the state had bought all of its license plates from out-of-state civilian contractors. In late 1933 New Mexico buys its own manufacturing equipment and installs it in the State Prison at Santa Fe. From 1934 through 1998 all New Mexico plates are made by convicts at the State Pen.
- 1935** – The New Mexico Motor Patrol changes its name to New Mexico State Police, and beginning in 1938 will receive special plates for its vehicles, replacing the “Official” plates formerly used. These plates bear the “State Police” name, and the practice continues to this day.
- 1936** – Total motor vehicle registrations exceed 100,000.
- 1937** – Other than the current Centennial plates, 1937 is the only year that New Mexico ever made a regular-issue license plate whose color even remotely resembles turquoise. In fact, the ’37 color is best described as robin’s egg blue, and it has dark maroon numbers. Officially, the colors are called “Navajo red on turquoise blue.”

- 1937** – Salesman plates are introduced.
- 1937** – Truck registrations exceed 25,000.
- 1939** – Salesman plates are discontinued and School Bus plates are introduced in the same general layout as the former Salesman plates.
- 1940** – In commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's passage through the state, and for this one year only, the phrase "CORONADO CUARTO CENTENNIAL" appears prominently across the top of New Mexico's plates .
- 1941** – New Mexico's recently adopted nickname of "The Land of Enchantment" appears on license plates for the first time. The word "The" is dropped in 1952.
- 1941** – Special plates are made available to members of the New Mexico Mounted Patrol, an all-volunteer police auxiliary organization whose operations were largely carried out on horseback. The license plates were for their cars and trucks, not the horses.
- 1943** – The critical metal shortages of World War II induce New Mexico to forgo issuing metal plates. Instead, vehicles keep their 1942 plates, and receive a paper decal which is glued to the inside of the windshield. The only exceptions, motorcycles and trailers (which typically did not have windshields), receive their usual metal plates.
- 1944** – Metal plates are reintroduced, but in keeping with war materiel conservation each vehicle receives only one plate, a policy that will last through 1947.
- 1946** – Special plates are made for a limited number of elected officials other than just the Governor. The Secretary of State, for example, receives a plate embossed with that title.
- 1947** – With the close of World War II in 1945, America found itself with tens of thousands of unneeded military airplanes. What to do with all that aluminum? Make license plates out of airplanes! Whereas all New Mexico plates in the past were made of steel, 1947 was the beginning of several years of aluminum plates. Since that time the state has switched back and forth between the two materials as costs have fluctuated.

- 1947** – A numerical county number prefix is added to all plates, with the Zia symbol separating the county number from the plate serial number. Santa Fe gets county #1, Bernalillo #2, and so on through #31 for Mora County. The counties are renumbered in 1948, with all but eight counties receiving reshuffled prefixes. Los Alamos County, formed in 1949, subsequently is assigned #32, while Cibola County, created in 1981, came along after county prefixes had already been discontinued in 1972.
- 1947** – New Mexico registrations of passenger cars alone surpass 100,000 for the first time.
- 1948** – New Mexico resumes issuing two plates to each vehicle. The 2-plate policy will last another dozen years, until 1960.
- 1949** – Instead of the usual smooth surface, 1949 plates are embossed with a textured, or “waffle” surface, making the aluminum less susceptible to cracking from vibration. Other than some leftover blanks used to make a few plates in the early 1950s, waffle plates will never be seen again.
- 1949** – Truck registrations exceed 50,000 and total motor vehicle registrations exceed 200,000.
- 1952** – Reflective tags are introduced, but on Official plates only.
- 1952** – The word “TRUCK” is dropped from a very small number of truck plates issued late in the year, while retaining colors that are the reverse of those on passenger plates.
- 1953** – The two-digit year is moved out of the Zia and placed in the upper left corner of the plate. To make room, the word “THE” is dropped from the “THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT” slogan.
- 1953** – Because their cars were equipped with two-way radio communication equipment which could be useful in highway emergencies, the state begins issuing special plates to licensed amateur (“ham”) radio operators in 1953. Bearing the radio call sign of the operator, these plates make it easier to identify those who might be able to assist in an emergency. These special plates are still available today.



**1953** – For the first time, special plates are made available to New Mexico State Senators and State Representatives, and have been available continuously since then, except 1954.

**1953** – The word “TRUCK” is again dropped from some truck plates, with the conversion complete by the end of the year. Colors will continue to be the reverse of those on passenger plates through 1960.

**1953** – Automobile registrations pass the 200,000 mark and total registrations exceed 300,000.

**1953** – This is the last known year that seals, or “tabs,” were used on Commercial plates.

**1953** – Mail order registration renewals are introduced, though the procedure is quite onerous. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, February 15, 1953, p.22, c.4]

**1955** – House trailers are required to be registered and obtain distinctive license plates, even if they aren’t going anywhere.

**1955** – For this one year only a special tag is issued to “small trailers.”

**1956** – At the urging of the automobile industry, New Mexico joins with all other states in the country in standardizing the size of their plates to six by twelve inches, thereby simplifying the manufacture of bumpers.

**1959** – Passenger car registrations exceed 300,000 and trucks exceed 100,000.

**1960** – New Mexico begins issuing renewal stickers for the first time, rather than issuing new plates every year. The 1960 stickers are affixed to the 1959 plates. Governor John Burroughs receives sticker # 1.

**1960** – Total registrations pass the 500,000 mark.

**1961** – Undated plates are introduced to facilitate the use of renewal stickers over a multi-year period. Although plates with embossed dates would appear a few more times in the future, the undated plate is here to stay.

**1961** – Reflective plates are adopted for general use, a decade after they were first used on Official vehicles.

- 1961** – The practice of making truck plates with colors the reverse of passenger colors is ended. From now through 1974 truck tags will have distinctly different colors.
- 1961** – The front license plate is eliminated, returning to the one-plate-per-car policy which is still the rule more than a half century later.
- 1963** – Horseless Carriage license plates become available for vehicles more than 35 years old. At the time, the 35 year age stipulation made perfect sense for this classification, but the requirement has never been updated, which means that today you can get a Horseless Carriage plate for a 1985 muscle car.
- 1966** – Motorcycle registrations exceed ten thousand for the first time.
- 1966** – Automobile registrations pass the 400,000 mark.
- 1967** – Personalized, or “vanity” plates are made available for cars and trucks. Although only forty-three of these plates are sold the first year, they will later become immensely popular.
- 1969** – The letters “USA” are added after the state name to help geography-challenged people in other states know where we’re from.
- 1969** – Truck registrations pass 150,000.
- 1970** – Automobile registrations are up to 450,000 and motorcycle registrations reach 20,000.
- 1970** – Total registrations exceed 750,000.
- 1972** – Motor vehicles have become so numerous that New Mexico’s license plates have run out of room for numbers. This forces the elimination of the county number prefixes, and the introduction of the three-letter / three-number system for cars. Truck plates will follow suit in 1975.
- 1974** – Through a combination of material shortages and bureaucratic bungling, the state runs out of steel license plate blanks and finds itself forced to issue paper license plates. Two months later the state is finally able to obtain a supply of aluminum blanks, and vehicle owners are mailed metal plates bearing the same number as appeared on the corresponding paper plate.

- 1974** – During the Arab oil embargo, a special renewal sticker is issued to vehicles which run on propane, or LPG.
- 1975** – The county prefix system is eliminated on Truck plates. In its place is a two-letter / four-number serial configuration.
- 1975** – A general reissue of virtually all non-passenger plates is done in red-on-yellow colors.
- 1976** – In order to satisfy motorists who lamented the loss of the county number system, plates are introduced which have a rectangular depression at the top where a decal bearing the county name can be optionally affixed.
- 1976** – In celebration of the country's bicentennial, purchasers of vanity plates this year receive a stunning red, white and blue license plate.
- 1979** – Although today's familiar red-on-yellow color scheme had been used sporadically as far back as 1929, it isn't until the end of the 1970s that these colors, drawn from those of the state flag, become permanent.
- 1979** – Vanity plates are made available for motorcycles for the first time.
- 1980** – The flood gates are opened, and over the next thirty years the State Legislature authorizes dozens of new types of license plates to be issued to commemorate New Mexico military veterans, public servants, volunteer organizations, fraternal organizations, museums, universities, and other special causes.
- 1982** – For the past seventy years, New Mexico's license plates had always expired on December 31, sometimes with a 30- or 60-day grace period. Consequently, the workload at the Department of Motor Vehicles (later renamed the Motor Vehicle Division) during this period was not only unmanageable, but was further exacerbated by the renewal period falling in the middle of the traditional Christmas - New Year's holiday season. In April 1982, the staggered registration system is introduced, such that a vehicle's registration will expire in the same month that it was initially registered, thereby spreading the Department's workload evenly throughout the year. Renewal stickers, therefore, now bear the month as well as the year.

**1992** – For well over a half century, since 1930, New Mexico has issued unique plates to light trucks (e.g., pickup trucks). Hereafter, they will receive the same plates as cars.

**1992** – The three-letter / three-number layout is reversed to a three-number / three letter sequence. Native American designs and picture of a yucca are added to the border.

**1999** – New Mexico makes available an optional 2-year registration as of January 2, 1999.

**2000** – The popular “balloon” plate is made available for general issue.

**2001** – Since their inception in 1960, the serial numbers on renewal stickers had no direct relationship to the serial numbers of the plates themselves. In 2001 the serial numbering system on the stickers is changed such that the sticker serial matches the plate serial. This is done for all types of plates, not just those for passenger cars.

**2010 - 2020** – One hundred years after New Mexico’s first license plates were issued, the Motor Vehicle Division makes available the “turquoise” Centennial plate. A common misconception is that this is a “retro” design, harking back to the appearance of New Mexico’s early license plates. In fact, the only year that New Mexico had plates whose color came even close to resembling turquoise was 1937, and even on those plates the numbers were dark maroon, not yellow. In spite of grumbling about these new plates being difficult to read, they have become wildly popular with motorists.

**2016** – The Centennial slogan at the top of the turquoise plates is removed because it is no longer timely. Turquoise plates are still available, though, now with the Land of Enchantment slogan moved up from the bottom of the plate to take the place of the Centennial slogan. Additionally, the letters “USA” which had not previously been used on the turquoise tags, have been added after the state name.

**2017** – In a race to beat out Colorado—a state alleged to have designs to usurp New Mexico’s long standing title of “Chile Capital of the World”—the New Mexico MVD began releasing its new Chile license plates on July 10, 2017, somewhat earlier than originally planned. These plates were initially made available in Passenger Car, Motorcycle, Vanity, and Motorcycle Vanity styles.

# Amateur Radio

Having first been issued in 1953, Amateur, or “Ham” Radio plates just barely fall within the era of “early” New Mexico plates. They are covered in detail here because they are a unique type that is poorly understood by many people.

Amateur Radio operators are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) after having passed a rigorous written examination covering the theory of electricity, electronics, radio receiving and transmitting, digital communication techniques, computer technology, and satellite communication, among other technical disciplines. The license authorizes them to communicate over the air with other “hams” in all parts of the world. While doing this, they identify themselves on the air with unique call signs issued by the FCC in conjunction with their licenses, much the same way as a commercial radio or TV station does.

For well over a century, amateur radio operators have been a resource for emergency communication during natural and man-made disasters. All of this is done on a purely volunteer basis, and in fact, hams are prohibited by law from receiving any kind of compensation for their services or the use of their equipment.

Because many, and perhaps even most, hams have always carried portable communications equipment in their cars, they frequently found themselves being called upon to assist at the scene of traffic accidents and other highway incidents. In the years following World War II it was realized that this resource could be put to use in more instances if only there were a way to easily identify hams traveling in their cars. Thus, the idea was born of issuing to them license plates bearing their FCC call signs.

New Mexico was by no means the first state to issue amateur radio plates, but did finally get around to it when enabling legislation was passed in 1953. [*Laws of 1953*, Chapter 91; Approved March 20, 1953. See also *Laws of 1959*, Chapter 155, which explicitly stated the purpose of these plates, and for the first time also made available similar plates to commercial radio station licensees.] Use of the plates was not mandatory, and those hams who did want the special plates paid an extra three dollars to offset the added expense of making one-of-a-kind tags.

Amateur radio plates were for many years identical to regular passenger plates except for the call sign replacing the serial number, and the plates were available in most years for use on both cars and trucks. The call signs are distinctly different from any other serial number patterns used on New Mexico plates, and a little background will make them easier to identify.

First of all, by international agreement, all USA radio call signs—whether they be amateur, commercial, or other—must start with an A, K, N, or W. (Every country is assigned its own unique letter, numeral, or combination thereof, for this purpose.) Any additional letters or numerals in the call sign are placed after the initial letter(s)/numeral(s) which identify the country.

At the time New Mexico first began issuing the plates in 1953, American amateur radio call signs were relatively straightforward. They all started with either a “W” or a “K” which was followed by a single numerical digit, which in turn was followed by either two or three more letters. Additionally, the U.S. was divided into ten districts, with New Mexico assigned to the 5th district (along with a few other states). Consequently, a ham in New Mexico might have a call sign that looked like W5AB, W5ABC, K5AB, or K5ABC. (A beginner, or “Novice” class licensee would also have the letter “N” inserted before the “5,” with the extra letter dropped after upgrading to a higher class of license.) For all practical purposes, there were no other variations, and this is what would appear on amateur radio license plates of the time.

During those days, if a ham moved to New Mexico from a different numerical district, he or she was required to get a new call sign containing the digit “5.” The only exceptions were persons who came to the state temporarily, as in the case of personnel stationed for a tour of duty at a New Mexico military base, or perhaps a college student present only while in school. In these rare instances a ham with an out-of-district call sign could get a New Mexico ham radio plate for the duration of his or her stay, which would not have a “5,” but a different numerical digit from 0 to 9. (In call signs, the digit “zero” is always written with a slash through it: 0 )

Things began to get more complicated around 1959 when all of the available letter combinations were used up and an extra letter was inserted before the numeral. Call signs of the form WA5ABC showed up, later followed by additional variations such as WB5ABC and WD5ABC, but the numerical digit always remained a “5” for New Mexico residents.

In the late 1970s the requirement that a call sign be changed when moving to a different district was dropped, and more and more out-of-district call signs began appearing as people moved to New Mexico from out of state. Then to complicate the picture even further, about that same time the FCC began issuing a much wider variety of call sign prefixes, adding, among other things, the letter “A” and the letter “N” to the mix. This resulted in a bewildering array of combinations: N5AB, N5ABC, AA5A, AB5AA, KA5A, KA5AB, KA5ABC, WZ5A, ad infinitum, not to mention the mix of the other nine numerical digits.

A person who has been a ham radio operator for a number of years will immediately recognize all of these permutations as call signs, but for the uninitiated, it’s not so easy. Finally, around 1991, the words “AMATEUR

RADIO OPERATOR” were added to the license plate, making it obvious to all who saw it.

Prior to 1980, hams received new plates with embossed dates most years, even when passenger cars received only stickers. Prominent exceptions were 1962 and 1963, when they received stickers bearing the word “RADIO,” and 1974 which received a sticker with the words “HAM RADIO,” though examples of these are known which were erroneously issued standard passenger car stickers.

Until April 1, 1979, New Mexico was a plate-to-car state, meaning that if you sold your car the license plate went with the car. The law granted only three exceptions to this rule: Political plates, such as those used by state legislators; plates on an out-of-state car sold in New Mexico; and ham radio plates. Unfortunately for the radio operator himself, the law required that he turn his ham plates back in to the Motor Vehicle Commissioner before replacement plates would be issued to the buyer. From April 1, 1979 onward, the owner kept the plate when the car was sold, regardless of what kind of plate it was.

Even though it was nearly the end of March (1953) by the time the enabling legislation was passed, many of the state’s Amateur Radio operators hopped on the bandwagon right away and got these special plates. As a result, 1953 ham plates are less difficult to find than some of the later ones. In fact, some of the most difficult years to come across are the 1961-1963 plates which started out with an undated base and then used stickers in the subsequent two years. But for many other later years when stickers were used on passenger car plates, hams got a new plate each year, and those are therefore more plentiful. Modern ham plates from about 1980 onward, because they were revalidated with stickers, not only are tougher to find than some of the earlier years, but because they bake in the sun for so long they’re often in poor condition when found.

The advent of cell phones ultimately diminished the need to seek out a ham radio operator when emergency communication was needed on the highway, but Amateur Radio license plates are still available for hams to this day, and the extra fee—though recently raised—is still only five dollars.

### **Motorcycle Amateur Radio**

Over the years a very few motorcycle plates have appeared bearing ham radio call signs (mine among them). A few vociferous claimants insist that these are true Amateur Radio motorcycle plates, but the fact of the matter is that they are not. There is no provision in New Mexico law permitting the issuance of ham plates for motorcycles, and these plates are nothing more than motorcycle vanity plates (mine among them).

## **Allowable Vehicle Types**

The original 1953 law said that “Any applicant who is an owner of a motor vehicle and a resident of this state, and who holds an official amateur radio station license, in good standing, issued by the Federal Communications Commission shall upon compliance with all laws of this state relating to registration and the licensing of motor vehicles and drivers, be furnished with license plates for such motor vehicle, as prescribed by law for passenger cars, upon which, in lieu of the numbers required for identification shall be inscribed the official amateur call letters of such applicant, as assigned by the Federal Communications Commission.”

More briefly stated, the law says, “ Any applicant who is an owner of a motor vehicle ... shall ... be furnished with license plates for such motor vehicle ...” This implies that it didn’t matter what kind of motor vehicle it was—car, truck, motorcycle, or whatever.

But finishing the last sentence mentioned immediately above, we read “... be furnished with license plates for such motor vehicle, as prescribed by law for passenger cars.” That now seems to make it more restrictive. Was the law interpreted to mean that ham plates were available only for passenger cars?

That may very well have been the case, or there may have been subsequent legislation that we have not yet found which clarified the law by explicitly declaring that the plates could be had only for passenger cars. Whatever the case, legislation was introduced in 1961 to permit the issuance of amateur radio plates to trucks, but Governor Edwin L. Mechem, without giving a reason, vetoed the bill after it had been passed by the legislature. [*Clovis News-Journal*, March 9, 1961, p.2, c.5]

Ultimately, the problem got fixed, and today ham plates can be obtained for both cars and trucks.



## Registration Data for Amateur Radio Plates Illustrated in this Chapter

For all practical purposes registration information is unavailable for license plates issued in New Mexico after 1938. Amateur Radio plates are an exception, though, because the license plate serial number is the ham's call sign which was issued by the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC retains information only on currently active and recently expired licenses, but there are legacy publications containing information derived from FCC records. Examples include *The New Mexico Ham Directory 1967-1968* by Bill Johnston and the *Radio Amateur Callbook Magazine* which began annual publication in 1920 and issued quarterly directories for many decades.

Neither these publications nor the FCC records contain information about motor vehicles, but they do provide the call sign and the licensee's name and address. Much of what appears below came from these sources. There are a few entries where the registration is noted as "unavailable," not because it can't be found, but simply because the applicable publications are not in our own archives.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Plate #</u>	<u>Registered To</u>
1953	W5FJE	Cedric H. Senter, Albuquerque
1954	W5ARD	Paul D. Drum, Dexter
1955	W5GPK	Harry Herman, Kirtland Air Force Base
1956	W5FJE	Cedric H. Senter, Albuquerque
1957	W5UNB	William L. Nohrn, Santa Fe
1958	W5UNB	William L. Nohrn, Santa Fe
1959	W6ASD	Daniel F. Connell, address unavailable
1960	W5FJE	Cedric H. Senter, Albuquerque
1961	W5DUO	Charles Johnson, Las Cruces
1962	K7HZV	Robert L. Hugo, address unavailable
1963	K5AYH	Martin Goodwin, Clovis
1964	W5UNB	William L. Norhn, Santa Fe
1965	W5LAJ	Dean D. Battishill, Silver City
1966	W5PEX	J. Dick Eichor, Los Alamos
1967	WA5FLG	Bill J. Farley, Alamogordo
1968	K5IFU	Arthur E. Trujillo, Las Cruces
1969	WA5SJB	Rachel Farley, Alamogordo
1970	W5UNB	William L. Nohrn, Santa Fe
1971	W5UNB	William L. Nohrn, Santa Fe
1972	W5UNB	William L. Nohrn, Santa Fe
1973	W5YB	Norman Dennis, Albuquerque

1974	W5HDR	Clarence G. Leonard, Mesilla Park
1975	WA5SJB	Rachel Farley, Alamogordo
1976	W5UNB	William L. Nohrn, Santa Fe
1977	N5BO	Ambrose G. Barry, Alamogordo
1978	WD5IOP	Oliver L. Kingsley, Las Cruces
1979	N5KR	William Johnston, Las Cruces
1980	K5HUI	George R. Nail, Albuquerque
1981	K5XY	Alexander F. Burr, Las Cruces
1982	KB5T	Oliver L. Kingsley, Las Cruces
1983	W5LAJ	Dean D. Battishill, Silver City
1984	K5MZ	Joe Martinez, Albuquerque
1985	KA5CWI	David H. Schuhmann, Las Cruces
1986	N4CHK	Robbie D. Arvidson, Albuquerque
1987	K5MZ	Joe Martinez, Albuquerque
1988	N5GLF	John Q. Boley, Las Cruces
1989	N5BKW	Charles Grove, Las Cruces
1990	K5IKL	Jerry D. Richardson, Deming
1991	N5MKG	Jesse D. Shepherd, Las Cruces
1992	NW5D	George P. Guebara, Las Cruces
1993	WB5UIB	Patricia A. Mathews, Albuquerque
1994	KB5RF	Michael W. Hendricks, Albuquerque
1995	W5NYB	John Shane, Albuquerque
1996	KD6HBK	Harvey J. Goodhart, Albuquerque
1997	W5BI	Gary A. Bonebrake, Rio Rancho
1998	N5CUF	Jacqueline Johnston, Organ
1999	N5XCQ	unavailable
2000	WA5SCP	Robert W. Ter Maat, Albuquerque
2001	K2GHM	Benson B. Boss, Deming
2002	KM5EH	Marcus Lieberman, Albuquerque
2014	K5JJB	Jacqueline Johnston, Organ
2016	K5ZI	William Johnston, Organ

## Photographs for this Chapter

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When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/AmateurRadio.htm>

# Boat

Water craft are not normally what we think of in connection with motor vehicles, but for a few years New Mexico issued boat license plates of a style that were remarkably like those supplied to motorcycles for the same years. New Mexico boat plates, therefore, are covered in this publication so that these plates may be distinguished from other plates that they resemble.

Boat plates are known to exist for the years 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958 and 1959. For those same years (and most others) the standard serial number format for New Mexico motorcycle plates was the letter "M" prefix, followed (usually, but not always) by a hyphen, followed by a 1- to 5-digit number. This format was inaugurated in 1924 and continued unbroken until at least 1980.

With the exceptions noted below, the boat plates for the five years in question are identical to the corresponding motorcycle plates in every respect except one. While the size, shape, color, and dies are identical, what differs is that in place of the "M" there is a single numerical digit. Like motorcycle plates, they were issued as singles, not pairs, and it is virtually certain that they were made in the State Penitentiary alongside the regular motorcycle plates.

The exceptions are these:

(a) 1956 boat plates exist in both motorcycle (i.e., car) colors, and truck colors. There is evidence to indicate that they may have started out the year being made in truck colors, and at some point not too far along a switch was made to motorcycle colors (which are the same as car colors).

(b) The 1955 boat plate lacks a raised border, and is about  $\frac{3}{8}$ " shorter than a motorcycle plate in each dimension. It also lacks the "N.M. 1955" expected at the top, and in its place the "55" date is hand-stamped in small numerals. Finally, it is in 1955 truck colors, and is embossed with the larger  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " passenger/truck numeric dies, as compared to the smaller 2" dies used on cycle plates. The '55 boat plate is even more of an anomaly when you realize that it pre-dates the earliest known regulations mandating their use by at least several months.

Public information about the boat plates first appeared as a Legal Notice in the *Las Vegas Daily Optic* newspaper published on March 21, 1956, entitled "Regulation of Boats and Boathouses on Conchas Dam Lake, Regulation No. 1." This is a regulation promulgated by the New Mexico State Park Commission, and for our purposes, the important parts of the regulation are the following:

“The operation of any boat or the placing of any boathouse on Conchas Lake, without a license as hereinafter provided, is hereby prohibited. All boats or boathouses licensed shall be for one or five years and shall expire on March 31 whether they be for one or five years.

“License plates will be furnished by the State Park Commission.

“All boats will display their license plate on the left side of the bow. Boathouses will display their license plate above the land-side door. The prefix number on boat license plates will indicate the maximum number of persons allowed in the boat at any time.”

While the regulation doesn’t state the size or color of the boat plates, the format given is exactly that found on all the known boat plates. They were used on only one side of the boat, which explains why they are found only as singles, never in pairs.

And here also we have the explanation for the numeric prefix, in place of the “M” seen on motorcycle plates. But if the prefix number indicates the maximum number of persons allowed in the boat, why are these plates known to exist with a “0” prefix? ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner opines, and I agree, that these must be the plates required for the boathouses.

Two years later another legal notice appeared in the same paper, on April 19, 1958. The title of this notice is:

“State of New Mexico, State Park Commission Regulation for Boats, Boathouses, Docks and Water Activities on Conchas Dam Lake, Conchas Dam State Park (Regulation No. 2).”

The only change affecting license plates is that the plate for boathouses, which in 1956 was required to be mounted “above the land-side door,” was required as of 1958 to “be affixed to any clearly visible spot on the side of the structure which faces the lake.” (Perhaps the inspectors, traveling mostly by boat, realized this would be more convenient for them.)

There are some important points to take note of in the regulations. First, they are not state regulations, per se. Rather, they are State Park Commission regulations. Second, they apply only to Conchas Dam Lake, which is located northwest of Tucumcari (and southeast of Las Vegas). Third, the mandated license plates are issued not by the state (and certainly not the Motor Vehicle Division), but by the State Park Commission.

Although the possibility isn't completely eliminated, I have found no evidence that similar regulations were ever enacted for any other lake in the state. Moreover, it is worth noting that the vast majority of the New Mexico boat plates of this type in my collection (and I have a lot of them) came from within 25 miles of Conchas Dam Lake!

Aside from the state boat plates described above, some years ago I assembled a collection of New Mexico boat plates from 1950 through 1959, inclusive. They were issued by the federal Bureau of Reclamation, and came in pairs, not singles. They all came from the vicinity of Elephant Butte Lake and Caballo Lake, located within a few miles of each other on the Rio Grande River, and as we will see, there is an explanation to be found for them as well.

Las Vegas is by no means the biggest town in New Mexico, and by no means the population center closest to any large body of water. Nonetheless, the *Daily Optic* for the third time produced answers, when on July 1, 1959 the paper published an article containing a synopsis of the *New Mexico Boat Act of 1959*.

In a departure from the Conchas Dam Lake State Park Commission regulations, the New Mexico Boat Act, which became effective July 1, 1959, was a *state* law which for the first time instituted statewide registration of all boats in the state, regardless of where they were used. In other words, as of 1959, all boats had to be registered with the state of New Mexico in essentially the same manner as automobiles are registered. The State Park Commission, however, was directed by the Act to implement the law, and to “adopt and promulgate rules and regulations to carry into effect the provisions of the Boat Act.”

By authority of the Boat Act, the State Park Commission administered the state licensing as follows: “Two adhesive plastic plates—pliable 4" x 10" strips—will be issued by the Park Commission for every boat registered in this state. The registration number appears on those plates. One such plate must be affixed on either side of the bow of the boat.” [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, July 1, 1959, p. C1] To this day, New Mexico boat “plates” are essentially the same style, and are still used in pairs as set forth in this law more than sixty years ago.

The State Park Commission went on to emphasize that “The lake license plates issued at Conchas Dam by the Park Commission are NOT State registration plates. These lake licenses are ‘use’ permits, and bear no relationship to boat registration. The lake license plates issued at Elephant Butte and Caballo do NOT comprise any sort of Federal ‘registration,’ and do not serve as a substitute for the prescribed State boat registration.”

Neither the New Mexico Boat Act, nor the State Park Commission’s regulations implementing the Act, makes reference to boat plates in use at any

lakes other than Conchas Dam Lake, Elephant Butte Lake, and Caballo Lake. Therefore it can be reasonably inferred that these are the only lakes where such plates were ever in use. The fact that the dams at both Elephant Butte and Caballo were built and operated by the federal Bureau of Reclamation, primarily as agricultural irrigation projects, would explain why the plates (“use permits”) at those two lakes were issued by that federal agency.

The need for lake “use” license plates ended when the 1959 Boat Act brought about statewide licensing effective July 1, 1959. The single metal plate was superseded by the aforementioned pair of 4" x 10" self adhesive plastic strips bearing the registration number.

Whereas the 1959 law required licensing only of power boats of 10 horsepower and over, nowadays all boats must be registered, including even canoes, rowboats and sailboats.

An additional modern requirement, now in place for well over twenty years, is that a dated 3" x 3" “Vessel Validation Decal” must be displayed on the port side of the bow, 6 inches to the right of the registration number. The “decal” is a self-adhesive sticker showing the expiration date of the registration. At present all NM boat registrations are valid for 3 years and expire on December 31st of the final registration year. [N.M. DMV website: <https://www.dmv.org/nm-new-mexico/boat-registration.php>]

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

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When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/Boat.htm>

# Bus

For all practical purposes during the early years, and for the better part of a decade, New Mexico considered Buses and Taxis to be one and the same thing. Both types were descended from the Commercial Car plate, and it would not be until 1931 that they were fully separated from each other.

Prior to legislation passed in 1929 there had been no mention of the term “Bus” in New Mexico’s statutes, and all evidence points to buses carrying Commercial Car plates through 1929. The 1929 motor vehicle law [Chapter 119, § 1], however, introduced two additional definitions to make a distinction:

“ ‘**Bus.**’ Motor vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, having a normal seating capacity in excess of seven persons.”

“ ‘**Taxicabs.**’ Motor vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, having a normal seating capacity of not more than seven persons.”

As a result, 1930 opened with the introduction of a new type of plate, boldly embossed “BUS” vertically on the right hand side. These Bus plates (in passenger car colors) exist with both “BUS” and “CAR” seals (“tabs”), and the latter with capacities at least as low as 5 passengers, so every indication is that the “BUS” plate was used for both taxis and buses, but only for this one year.

1931 was the beginning of the “C” prefix commercial plate series that was to last into the early 1950s, albeit with the “C” omitted in the first year. The plates themselves are passenger car colors and have no embossed designation as to type, but a weight/capacity tab was attached with rivets through two small pre-punched holes at the right side of the plate. Here the “BUS” designation was used on the tab for only the second year, along with the usual figures showing vehicle weight and maximum number of passengers carried. The plates were numbered beginning with #1, and were it not for the rivet holes they would be indistinguishable from the passenger plates whose numbers they duplicated. This is no doubt why the “C” prefix was added the following year.

Registration records for 1931 show that out of approximately 300 commercial vehicles registered, 92 were buses, the remainder being taxis. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1931.*] This registration book does not show the month of its issue, but it does contain some “Supplement” pages, indicating that it could be as late as the third quarter, or even the end of the year. Numerous unissued tab-less 1931 commercial plates survive today, mostly numbered between 500 and 900, indicating that the

actual demand was far less than what the motor vehicle department projected when the plates were ordered in 1930.

A significant proportion of the buses in 1931 were registered to out-of-state companies engaged in interstate passenger transportation services. Examples include: North Plains Coaches, Amarillo, Texas; Imperial Bus Lines, Los Angeles, California; Pickwick Greyhound Lines, Kansas City, Missouri; Union Auto Transportation Company, El Paso, Texas; Pioneer Motor Lines, Lubbock, Texas.

1932 saw the introduction of the “C” prefix plates, which clearly distinguished commercial plates from all others. As in 1931, two pre-punched rivet holes were provided at the right side of the plate for attachment of the weight capacity tab, a procedure which continued for the next two decades.

All of the buses that would have fallen into the “Commercial Car” category during the 1920s now had this simpler style of commercial plate bearing a tab stamped simply “BUS.”

The use of weight/capacity tabs continued into the early 1950s, at which time the tabs were finally dropped. In 1955 a new and further simplified type of Bus plate was introduced, bearing a single letter “B” prefix, followed by the Zia, then the plate serial number. [Clovis News-Journal, October 15, 1954, p.2, c.4] The plates originally appeared in passenger plate colors, but there is evidence to indicate that they may have been in truck plate colors in some later years, as known examples from 1960 would indicate.

Please see the chapter on “C-prefix Commercial” plates for additional detail on Bus plates.

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# C-prefix Commercial

The Commercial Car plate, which had been used for both taxis and buses, disappeared after 1929, replaced in 1930 by a plate embossed “BUS” vertically on the right hand side. These newly designed Bus plates were used for both taxis and buses, but only for this one year, destined to be replaced themselves by the “C” prefix commercial plate series.

1931 was the beginning of the “C” prefix series of plates which were to last into the early 1950s, although without the “C” being used in the first year. The 1931 plates themselves are passenger car colors and have no embossed designation as to type, but a weight/capacity seal (“tab”) was attached with rivets through two small pre-punched holes at the right side of the plate. Here the “TAXI” and “BUS” designations were used on tabs for the first time (replacing the word “CAR”), along with the usual figures showing vehicle weight and maximum number of passengers carried.

The *1929 Laws of New Mexico* had introduced definitions to distinguish between Taxi and Bus—types which prior to 1929 had been considered to be the same. Chapter 119, § 1, defined them this way:

“**Taxicabs.**’ Motor vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, having a normal seating capacity of not more than seven persons.”

“**Bus.**’ Motor vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, having a normal seating capacity in excess of seven persons.”

At the same time, one additional definition was supplied, which has a bearing on the C-prefix license plates of this era:

“**Driverless Cars.**’ Motor Vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, for the operation of which no driver is furnished the lessor thereof.”  
[“Driverless” was the term used in the 1920s and 1930s for rental cars.]

As no change to these definitions has been found in later laws, it is reasonably safe to say that these were the basis for all tabs used from 1931 through the early 1950s. Taxi tabs should always show seven or fewer passengers and Bus tabs should always show eight or more passengers. It is not uncommon, however, to find plates where a Taxi tab has been erroneously used in place of a Bus tab, and vice versa, or on occasion to find that a Taxi tab has been over-stamped “BUS,” or the other way around.

The 1931 plates were numbered beginning with #1, and were it not for the rivet holes they would be indistinguishable from the passenger plates whose numbers they duplicated. This is almost certainly why the “C” prefix was added the following year.

Registration records for 1931 show that out of approximately 300 commercial vehicles registered that year, about 200 were taxis and 100 were buses. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1931*.] This registration book does not show the month of its issue, but it does contain some “Supplement” pages, indicating that it could be as late as the third quarter, or even the end of the year. Numerous unissued tab-less 1931 commercial plates survive today, mostly numbered between 500 and 900, indicating that the actual demand was far less than what the motor vehicle department projected when the plates were ordered in the latter part of 1930.

In addition to taxis and buses, the *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1931* shows 37 Driverless, or “DRL” cars (i.e., rental cars) registered, but having been issued regular passenger car plates, mostly in the 52,000 and 69,000 series, rather than having received Commercial plates. This would change in the subsequent years, when they would be issued C-prefix plates with “DRIVERLESS” tabs.

The 1932 plates saw the introduction of the “C” prefix, which eliminated the ambiguity of the prior year and clearly distinguished commercial plates from all others. Colors continued to be passenger car colors for this and all subsequent years. As in the inaugural year, two pre-punched rivet holes were provided at the right side of the plate for attachment of the weight/capacity tab. All vehicles which would have fallen into the “Commercial Car” category during the 1920s were now stamped simply “TAXI” or “BUS,” as appropriate, on the tab. Plates for rental cars bore tabs stamped “DRIVERLESS.”

This method was to continue into the early 1950s, at which time the weight/capacity tabs were finally dropped. In 1955 a new and simpler type of Bus plate was introduced, bearing a single letter “B” prefix, followed by the Zia, then the plate serial number. And in the same year a new type was also introduced for taxis, bearing a “TX” prefix, followed by the Zia, then the plate serial number.

[*Clovis News-Journal*, October 15, 1954, p.2, c.4] As far as is known, rental cars were switched to regular passenger plates by or before the end of the C-prefix era.

An interesting aspect of the tabs on the C-prefix plates is that it is not uncommon to find that while the year on the tab matches the year of the plate, the year on the tab has been over-stamped on top of some prior year—usually the preceding year, but sometimes on top of a year several years back. Perhaps these

were leftover tabs being used up to save money. Less common, but also seen from time to time, are tabs with TAXI over-stamped on BUS, and vice versa.

Unfortunately, over the years a very few unethical collectors have engaged in the practice of removing tabs from less-than-perfect tags and then mounting them on plates that are in better condition. The objective, of course, is to make the plates appear more desirable by purporting them to be something they aren't. On the positive side, the registration records for commercial plates are available for most years prior to 1940, and tags which have been tampered with in this manner can be easily exposed. (This is true of the earlier Commercial Car and Commercial truck tags, too.)

The following statistics give a general idea of the numbers of Bus, Taxi and Driverless vehicles licensed during selected years of the 1930s for which records are available. Keep in mind that some of these figures may have been tabulated before year end, and the actual totals could have been somewhat higher.

**1931**

100	Bus
200	Taxi
<u>45</u>	Driverless
345	Total

**1936**

288	Bus
130	Taxi
<u>61</u>	Driverless
479	Total

**1933**

119	Bus
99	Taxi
<u>34</u>	Driverless
252	Total

**1937**

268	Bus
165	Taxi
<u>57</u>	Driverless
490	Total

**1934**

172	Bus
87	Taxi
<u>37</u>	Driverless
296	Total

**1938**

274	Bus
151	Taxi
<u>33</u>	Driverless
458	Total

**1935**

209	Bus
90	Taxi
<u>43</u>	Driverless
342	Total

**Registration Data for Selected C-Prefix Plates  
Illustrated in this Chapter  
and on our companion website at  
NMplates.com/CPrefix.htm**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Plate #</u></b>	<b><u>Type</u></b>	<b><u>Registered To</u></b>
1931	175	Bus	Union Auto Trans. Co., El Paso, Texas, 1929 Pickwick bus
1931	185	Driverless	U Drive It Car Co., Albuquerque, 1930 Ford phaeton
1933	91	Taxi	Leandro Lopez, Albuquerque, 1926 Chrysler bus
1937	342	Taxi	J.T. Walker, Tucson, Arizona, 1933 Ford sedan
1938	280	Bus	George Harkness, Carrizozo, 1938 Ford sedan

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

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# Commercial Car

Treatment of commercial vehicles as a separate class was brought about by the 1923 motor vehicle law, which had an effective date of July 1, 1923. Prior to this date there was only one type of license (other than motorcycles and dealers), and the license fee was no different for a vehicle used commercially than for one used for pleasure. The new definition was given as follows:

***“Commercial Truck or Commercial Car.*** Any motor truck or motor vehicle operated for transporting commodities, articles, or passengers for hire not wholly within the limits of the same city, town or village, or operated by jobbers, merchants, peddlers or others for transporting commodities, merchandise or articles for sale or delivery to customers or branch stores not within the limits of the same city, town or village where the same are loaded.”

These new commercial categories came with higher registration fees. Vehicles which were already registered and equipped with regular porcelain plates had to be re-registered and pay the additional commercial fees, prorated for the remaining six months of the year. [1923 Laws, Chapter 96, Sec. 3] Their existing porcelain plates were replaced with embossed steel plates dated 1923 and reading COM CAR or COM TK. The colors were black on white, and white on green, respectively. New registrants on and after July 1 received the steel plates as initial issues.

An additional requirement of the 1923 law, Section 5, was that “Upon receipt of ... application and fee the registrar shall issue and deliver to [the] owner a registration certificate for such vehicle and without extra charge ... shall issue and deliver to such owner plates bearing the name of the State of New Mexico or abbreviation thereof, the number assigned to such vehicle and in case of a motor truck, commercial truck, commercial car mentioned in Section 3 hereof and in case of a trailer, a plate showing the weight and carrying capacity thereof.”

Here then was the origin of the weight/capacity seals (“tabs”) found on commercial plates of the 1920s and later. Though the use of Commercial plates was required beginning July 1, 1923, the new law set January 1, 1924 as the effective date when Commercial plates would show the vehicle’s weight and capacity. Hence, 1923 Commercial tags have no seals, but those from 1924 and later do have them.

Although there were a few exceptions, virtually all commercial cars were taxis (or buses). Their plates from 1923 through 1925 are embossed “COM CAR.” For 1926 through 1929, the plates are embossed simply “COM,” and the “CAR” designation is stamped onto the weight/capacity tab. Colors for 1923 were black on white [original example]; 1924 red on grey [New Mexico Highway Journal, November 1923, p. 8, and original examples which have been seen. Interestingly, the backs these plates are painted in the same

orange that is used as the overall background color on 1924 passenger plates.]; 1925 white on black [original example]; 1926 unknown, but possibly the same as known commercial truck, i.e., black on grey; 1927 yellow on black (reverse of passenger) [*Gallup Independent*, July 30, 1926, p.7, c.4, and known original examples]; 1928 blue on gold (reverse of passenger) [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, November 1927, p. 14]; 1929 unknown.

At this early stage there was no separate category for “Bus,” and the conjecture is that buses carried Commercial Car plates through 1929. The 1929 motor vehicle law [Chapter 119, § 1], however, introduced two additional definitions to make a distinction:

“**‘Taxicabs.’** Motor vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, having a normal seating capacity of not more than seven persons.”

“**‘Bus.’** Motor vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, having a normal seating capacity in excess of seven persons.”

1930 and 1931 were transition years with regard to commercial license plate design. The Commercial Car plate disappeared after 1929, and the only related type known for 1930 is a plate boldly embossed “BUS” vertically on the right hand side. These Bus plates (in passenger car colors) exist with “CAR” tabs, and with capacities at least as low as 5 passengers, so every indication is that the “BUS” plate was used for both taxis and buses, but only for this one year.

1931 was the beginning of the “C” prefix commercial plate series that was to last into the early 1950s, albeit with the “C” omitted in the first year. The plates themselves are passenger car colors and have no embossed designation as to type, but the weight/capacity tab was attached with rivets through two small pre-punched holes at the right side of the plate. Here the “TAXI” designation was used on the tab for the first time (replacing the word “CAR”), along with the usual figures showing vehicle weight and maximum number of passengers to be carried. The plates were numbered beginning with #1, and were it not for the rivet holes they would be indistinguishable from the passenger plates whose numbers they duplicated. In all probability this is why the “C” prefix was added the following year.

Registration records for 1931 show that out of approximately 300 commercial vehicles registered, 207 were taxis, the remainder being buses. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1931.*] This registration book does not show the month of its issue, but it does contain some “Supplement” pages, indicating that it could be as late as the third quarter, or even the end of the year. Numerous unissued tab-less 1931 commercial plates survive today, mostly numbered between 500 and 900, indicating that the actual demand was far less than what the motor vehicle department projected when the plates were ordered in the latter part of 1930.

The 1932 plates saw the introduction of the “C” prefix, which clearly distinguished commercial plates from all others. As in the inaugural year, two pre-punched rivet holes were provided at the right side of the plate for attachment of the weight/capacity tab. All of these which would have fallen into the “Commercial Car” category during the 1920s were now stamped simply “TAXI” (or, in some cases, “BUS”) on the tab.

This method was to continue into the early 1950s, at which time the weight/capacity tabs were finally dropped. In 1955 a new type of plate was introduced for taxis, bearing a “TX” prefix, followed by the Zia, then the plate serial number. [Clovis News-Journal, October 15, 1954, p.2, c.4] Some years the plates bore car colors, others truck colors (particularly during the 1960s), but ultimately they ended up with the familiar red-on-yellow scheme that most other plates had.

In all cases the capacities shown on the tabs affixed to Commercial Car plates state the number of passengers the car is rated to carry, which is straightforward enough. But it is not entirely unusual to come across tabs on plates of this type which contain errors. For example, for several decades I had puzzled over a 1928 Commercial plate, #1-854, in my collection which has a CAR tab showing a weight of 3335 lbs, and a capacity of 1½ passengers. What in the world would be a half a passenger? I put that question to ALPCA Archivist, Eric Tanner, who immediately replied that it was probably a 1½ ton Commercial Truck which had been accidentally issued a CAR tab.

This prompted me to look up the license in the *Motor Vehicle Register 1928*, where I found the plate registered not to a car, but to a 1927 Graham truck in Tularosa, weighing 3335 lbs. A photo of this tab appears later in this chapter, and on our companion website at: [NMplates.com/CommercialCar.htm](http://NMplates.com/CommercialCar.htm) (See the Chapters on “C” Prefix Commercial, Bus, and Taxi for descriptions of errors seen on tabs of those types.)

Registration data is particularly lacking in the 1920s, but data for the few years available shows the following:

- 1924** Mid-year registration records show 422 Commercial Cars as of June 1. These figures would have been augmented by new vehicle purchases (and therefore additional registrations) in the latter half of the year—perhaps an increase of another 25% or so. [Motor Vehicle Register 1924]
- 1926** Commercial Cars and Commercial Trucks are not identified individually, but are lumped together in a single listing showing a total of 2,100 of these vehicles, which is probably a mid-year figure. [Motor Vehicle Register 1926]

- 1927** As in the case of the preceding year, Commercial Cars and Commercial Trucks are not listed separately, but are combined in a single listing, this time showing a total of 1,559 of these vehicles, which is again probably a mid-year figure. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1927*]
- 1928** Approximately 2,200 Commercial Cars and Commercial Trucks registered, with the vast majority being Trucks. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1928*]

**Registration Data for Selected Commercial Car Plates Illustrated in this  
Chapter  
and on our companion website at  
NMplates.com/CommercialCar.htm**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Plate #</u>	<u>Registered To</u>
1924	55	L.L. Chaplain, Koehler, N.M., 1919 Hudson touring car
1927	767	Tom Winkler, Hachita, N.M., 1925 Buick touring car
1928	1-854	J.W. Bearden, Tularosa, N.M., 1927 Graham truck, 3335 lbs. (Note that this Commercial Car plate and seal were erroneously assigned to a truck.)

## Photographs for this Chapter

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# Commercial Truck

Treatment of commercial vehicles as a separate class was brought about by the 1923 motor vehicle law, which had an effective date of July 1, 1923. Prior to this date there was only one type of license (other than motorcycles and dealers), and the license fee was no different for a vehicle used commercially than for one of the same horsepower used for pleasure. The new definition was given as follows:

***“Commercial Truck or Commercial Car.*** Any motor truck or motor vehicle operated for transporting commodities, articles, or passengers for hire not wholly within the limits of the same city, town or village, or operated by jobbers, merchants, peddlers or others for transporting commodities, merchandise or articles for sale or delivery to customers or branch stores not within the limits of the same city, town or village where the same are loaded.”

These new commercial categories came with higher registration fees, now based on carrying capacity rather than horsepower. Vehicles which were already registered, and therefore already equipped with regular 1923 porcelain plates, had to be re-registered and the additional commercial fees paid, prorated for the remaining six months of the year. [1923 Laws, Chapter 96, Sec. 3] Their existing porcelain plates were replaced with embossed steel (“tin”) plates dated 1923 and reading COM CAR or COM TK. The colors were black on white, and white on green, respectively. New registrants on and after July 1 received the embossed plates as initial issues.

An additional requirement of the 1923 law, Section 5, was that “Upon receipt of ... application and fee the registrar shall issue and deliver to [the] owner a registration certificate for such vehicle and without extra charge ... shall issue and deliver to such owner plates bearing the name of the State of New Mexico or abbreviation thereof, the number assigned to such vehicle and in case of a motor truck, commercial truck, commercial car mentioned in Section 3 hereof and in case of a trailer, a plate showing the weight and carrying capacity thereof.”

Here then was the origin of the weight/capacity seals (“tabs”) found on commercial plates of the 1920s and later. Though the use of Commercial plates was required beginning July 1, 1923, the new law set January 1, 1924 as the effective date when Commercial plates would show the vehicle’s weight and capacity. Hence, 1923 Commercial tags have no seals, but those from 1924 and later do have them.

The table beginning on the next page summarizes Commercial Truck plates for the seven years they existed, 1923 through 1929.

- 1923** “COM” stacked vertically over horizontal “TK.” on left side; “1923” stacked vertically on right side; “N.M.” horizontal at bottom; plate serial number middle. No weight/capacity tab used in 1923. Colors are white on green (original example).
- 1924** “COM. TRUCK” horizontal at bottom; “N-M” stacked vertically on right over horizontal “24”; plate serial number middle. Round weight/capacity tab attached with rivets on left. Plate colors are black on orange (original example, same as passenger).
- 1925** “COM. TRUCK” horizontal at bottom; “N-M” stacked vertically on right over horizontal “25”; “FRONT” or “REAR” stacked vertically on left; plate serial number middle. A round weight/capacity tab was attached with rivets between the FRONT/REAR designation and the plate serial number. Plate colors unknown.
- 1926** “COM” horizontal at top right, horizontal “NM” stacked over horizontal “26” at left, plate serial number in middle. Square weight/capacity tab affixed with rivets at lower right, embossed “N.M.” over “TRUCK” at top, with weight and capacity for the specific truck hand stamped in middle. “1926” embossed at bottom of tab. Plate colors are black on grey (original example). Plate is the same 4½" x 12" as passenger plates.
- 1927** “COM” stacked vertically at top right. “NEW MEXICO” across bottom of plate. Zia at left with “27” in center of Zia, plate serial number in middle of plate. Square weight/capacity tab affixed with rivets at lower right, stamped “N.M.” over “TRUCK” at top, with weight and capacity for the specific truck hand stamped in middle. “1927” embossed at bottom of tab. Plate colors are unknown, but the *Gallup Independent* [July 30, 1926, p.7, c.4] reported that passenger car colors would be black on yellow, with the colors reversed for commercial cars. As commercial truck plates used the same base plate as those for commercial cars, it is presumed that they were also the reverse of passenger car colors.
- 1928** “COM” stacked vertically at top right. “NEW MEXICO” across bottom of plate. Zia at left with “28” in center of Zia, plate serial number in middle of plate. Square weight/capacity tab affixed with rivets at lower right, stamped “N.M.” over “TRUCK” at top, with weight and capacity for the specific truck hand stamped in middle. “1928” embossed at bottom of tab. Plate colors blue on yellow (original example, reverse of passenger). [Confirmed by *New Mexico Highway Journal*, November 1927, p.14, in reference to commercial car plates.]

**1929** “COM” stacked vertically at top right. “NEW MEXICO” across bottom of plate. Zia at left with “29” in center of Zia, plate serial number in middle of plate. Square weight/capacity tab affixed with rivets at lower right, stamped “N.M.” over “TRUCK” at top, with weight and capacity for the specific truck hand stamped in middle. “1929” embossed at bottom of tab. Plate colors are unknown, but in view of the year before being reverse of passenger, 1929 is likely the reverse also.

The *1929 Laws* brought about a significant and permanent change in the license plates assigned to trucks beginning in 1930. Gone were the “COM” plates and the individualized weight/capacity tabs that went with them. In their place was an entirely new style of plate in passenger colors, with the word “TRUCK” embossed vertically in block letters at the right side.

Although the tabs were gone, registration fees were still based on the weight/capacity of the truck but it was apparently felt that the extra trouble and expense of affixing individualized tabs to truck plates were unwarranted.

Registration data is particularly lacking in the 1920s, but data for the few years available shows the following:

- 1924** Mid-year registration records show 880 Commercial Trucks as of June 1. These figures would have been augmented by new vehicle purchases (and therefore additional registrations) in the latter half of the year—perhaps an increase of another 25% or so. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1924*]
- 1926** Commercial Cars and Commercial Trucks are not identified individually, but are lumped together in a single listing showing a total of 2,100 of these vehicles, which is probably a mid-year figure. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1926*]
- 1927** As in the case of the preceding year, Commercial Cars and Commercial Trucks are not listed separately, but are combined in a single listing, this time showing a total of 1,559 of these vehicles, which is again probably a mid-year figure. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1927*]
- 1928** Approximately 2,200 Commercial Cars and Trucks registered, with the vast majority being Trucks. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1928*]

Keep in mind that all through the Commercial Truck license plate era, 1923-1929, non-commercial trucks—and there were many of them—continued to receive the same plates as automobiles. Included in this category receiving automobile plates were state, county, and municipal trucks until the advent of

Official plates in 1929. In 1928, for example, the New Mexico Military Institute, together with the City of Roswell, received automobile plates in the 19363 to 19387 block for vehicles which included Studebaker, Kelly, Pierce Arrow, Packard, Diamond T, Velie, and Ford trucks, two La France fire trucks, a Diamond T sprinkler truck, and an Elgin street sweeper.

One might be inclined to think that some of these, and especially the street sweeper, would be exempt from licensing, but the *1923 Laws* exempted only tractors and road rollers used in agriculture and road construction.

Please see the chapter on “Truck” plates for a further discussion of this later series of TRUCK plates.

**Registration Data  
for Selected Commercial Truck Plates Illustrated in this Chapter  
and on our companion website at  
NMplates.com/CommercialTruck.htm**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Plate #</u></b>	<b><u>Registered To</u></b>
1924	102	Chester A. Wood, Clayton, N.M., 1923 Ford truck
1926	417	Jose E. Suaso, Parkview, N.M., 1925 Ford truck
1927	1-135	Gene Rowland, Artesia, N.M., 1926 Ford truck
1928	555	Jose E. Suaso, Parkview, N.M., 1927 Chevrolet truck

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# Dealer

As in any other state, the purpose of a dealer plate was to remove the financial burden of an automobile dealer having to register and pay a license fee for every car on his lot. Dealers, however, were entirely overlooked in the state's initial attempt at regulation, which was passed early in the first year of statehood. The 1912 automobile licensing law, Chapter 28, Section 1, said it this way:

“No person or persons, firm or corporation owning an automobile in this state shall be permitted to maintain or operate the same without first obtaining a state license as hereinafter provided.”

There were no exceptions. To comply with the letter of the law meant that a dealer would have to buy a \$10 license for every car he had in stock. In such a case, the plate could be transferred to the buyer for a fee of \$1, but until that time the dealer would have the original ten dollar license fee tied up in each and every car that he had for sale.

## 1913

The following year the state legislature passed a revised law, effective March 15, which became Chapter 19 of the *1913 Laws of New Mexico*. Dealers were addressed in Section 6:

“Every person, firm, association or corporation, manufacturing or dealing in motor vehicles may, instead of registering each vehicle, apply for a dealer's license, which shall be in form as provided by the Secretary of State and shall be a permit allowing the manufacturer or dealer to drive or exhibit motor vehicles on the streets or highways. Such manufacturer or dealer shall have attached to the rear of each vehicle a plate or card of the same size as the number plate, bearing the name of the person, firm or corporation, and the word DEALER. The fee for a dealer's license shall be twelve (\$12.00) dollars per annum.”

Although none of these are known to have surfaced in modern times, the “dealer's license, which shall be in form as provided by the Secretary of State” included an actual license plate. This is unequivocally clear in the 1913 dealer registration records, which includes a column entitled “LICENSE AND TAG SENT.” In that column is the date that the license and the tag were sent out from Santa Fe. And apparently, that particular tag itself did not have to be used on the cars being demonstrated, for the law goes on to say that the “dealer shall have

attached to the rear of each vehicle a plate or card of the same size as the number plate, bearing the name of the person, firm or corporation, and the word DEALER.”

So the dealer could very well have hung the tag on the wall of his office, as one might display an occupational license, and could have used replicas that were homemade cards or plates, thereby preserving the original. It’s not clear whether the “number plate” to which the size had to be matched was the dealer tag that was received, or the number plates of privately owned automobiles, but there is evidence to indicate that they were in fact all the same size.

We can only guess as to the exact appearance of the plate, but as we will see later, it probably had the word “DEALER,” the name of the person or company, and the license number. It may or may not have carried the year. The *1915 Compilation of the Laws of New Mexico* reiterated the wording of the 1913 law, unchanged, so it’s probably safe to conclude that the form of the plate remained unchanged for a few more years as well.

The fact that there are no known surviving examples of 1913 dealer plates can probably be explained by the fact that only 23 of these licenses, consecutively numbered from 1 to 23, were issued that year. [*Automobile License Record 1912-1914*]

The law provided that the license fees for regular automobiles would be reduced to one-half for licenses issued on or after July 1, and the records show that the same procedure was used for dealer licenses. And in one instance, duplicate dealer tags were issued at reduced cost. The W.H. Hahn Auto Company of Albuquerque, which already held 1913 Dealer’s license #17, applied for and received two more, #19 and #20, at a total cost of only fifty cents for the two. These duplicates were mailed to Hahn from Santa Fe on September 18, 1913.

Also, there was one transfer of a 1913 Dealer’s license, which occurred on November 1, 1913. For a fee of one dollar, license #5 was transferred from W.O. Bourne of East Las Vegas, to the Las Vegas Sales Auto Co.

## 1914

Still operating under the same law, 79 dealer licenses were issued in 1914. The numbering picked up where the 1913 licenses left off, so these were numbered consecutively from 24 to 102. A column in the registration ledger labeled “Tags & Cards Sent” gives the date that each license and dealer plate was sent out. [*Automobile License Record 1912-1914*] Those registered on and after July 1, however, did not receive the half-price break of the previous year. (The

stipulation for the discount was actually embedded in the paragraph dealing with regular automobile licenses, and somebody probably later decided that it didn't apply to dealers.)

The registration records show two instances of duplicate dealer tags having been sent out at a charge of one dollar per plate. In contrast to the preceding year when additional numbered licenses were assigned, the ledger entries show that the 1914 duplicates were under the same number as the license originally issued.

Unfortunately, as in the case of the 1913 dealer plates, not a single one of the 1914 dealer plates is known to have survived.

## 1915

The story gets a little more interesting in 1915, even though we're dealing with the same law, because out of 80 issued, at least two of the 1915 dealer plates are still around today. (Numbering started over at #1 this year, with the plates numbered consecutively up to 80.)

The two survivors are in 1915 colors (i.e., white on red), and appear to be commercially produced generic plates with embossed words "DEALERS LICENSE" across the top half of the plate. Then neatly hand painted across the bottom of both plates is the license number (14), and the name "W.D. Newton." One of the two plates also has the letters "N.M." at the lower right corner. They are both essentially identical in size to 1912-1913 passenger plates, i.e., 5½" x 12½", which puts them in compliance with the 1913 Law which said that license plates were to be a minimum of 5" x 10". (The Newton plates also bear other similarities to the 1912/13 plates, including the folded edges and the placement and size of the bolt holes and slots. This raises the distinct possibility that they were manufactured by the S.G. Adams Co. of St. Louis, the company which is confirmed to have made New Mexico's first-issue passenger plates. See the chapter on "Manufacturers" for more details.)

Checking the registration records for 1915, one finds a ledger entry dated January 1, 1915, for Dealer License # 14, issued to Willis D. Newton of Las Cruces, New Mexico. [*Automobile License Record 1915*] Newton was the Ford dealer, not just for Las Cruces, but for all of Doña Ana County. [*Rio Grande Republic*, February 11, 1913, p.8, c.4] Newton, incidentally, had dealer's license #3 in 1913, #28 in 1914, and #88 in 1916. [*Automobile License Record 1912-1914* and *Automobile License Record 1916*] Little else has been learned about Mr. Newton, but news reports state that he and his wife moved to Las Cruces from New York. [*Rio Grande Republic*, June 9, 1914, p.3, c.3]

There is nothing in either the law or contemporary news dispatches to indicate who painted the license number and dealer's name on the bottom half of these plates, but I have long been of the opinion that for the sake of neatness and uniform appearance the work was done in Santa Fe before the plates were mailed out. This conjecture was recently proven correct with the discovery of the Secretary of State's expense records for 1914, wherein a line item shows a disbursement for "Painting Auto Dealer's Tags." As luck would have it, several other items (Printing, Telephone, Stamps, Stationery, etc.) are rolled into the same line item, making it impossible to know how much of the disbursement was used for painting the Dealer's tags. [*Report of the Secretary of State Antonio Lucero for the Two Years Including November 30th, 1914*, p. 13. (First and Second Fiscal Years, FY 1913 and FY 1914)]

The 1915 registration records do not have a "Tag Sent" column in the ledger, but there are a number of individual notations of "two extra tags sent," "four extra tags sent," and so forth, at a cost of one dollar each. The fact that "extra tags" were sent shows conclusively that the original tag was sent, too, just as in 1913 and 1914. Similar notations for extra tags sent out are seen in the 1914 records, and presumably these dealers found it easier to use the more durable state-issued tags at a buck apiece, rather than making their own "cards" as the law authorized them to do.

As was the case for 1914, the 1915 ledger entries show that the 1915 extra tags supplied by Santa Fe were under the same number as the licenses originally issued to the respective dealers, as opposed to the 1913 procedure where each duplicate was assigned an additional license number.

The two surviving 1915 plates are both undated, but they are positively identified by the registration record for license #14 for that year, not to mention that they are painted in 1915 colors. Without actual examples on hand, determining what the plates looked like in the two prior years involves a little speculation, but in view of the fact that they were all issued under the same law and the same circumstances, it is likely that they were essentially the same as the 1915 plates, but in 1913 and 1914 colors, respectively.

## **1916-1919**

Any mystery ends in 1916, when the state began issuing oversize 5½" x 15" dealer license plates that were embossed with the words "DEALERS LICENSE," the license number, the abbreviation "N-M," and the two digit year 16. The entire lower right quadrant of the plate was left blank, undoubtedly as a place to write in the name of the dealer, as required by law.

This same format was used for all years 1916-1919, inclusive. These plates are exceedingly rare, with just one each known for 1916 and 1918, and two



each for 1917 and 1919. Only one of these has the original paint, the 1918, which is of the “thin” variety, and is the same color as passenger plates of that type. We don’t know for sure, but for that point in New Mexico plate history, it’s probably a safe assumption that the other plates were passenger colors also.

### **1920–1923**

The switch to porcelain plates in 1920 did not greatly alter the basic layout of dealer plates. Measuring 5¾" x 14¾" —significantly larger than automobile plates of the same type—porcelain dealer plates replicated the general appearance of those from the previous four years. Across the top of the plate, in large letters, are the words “DEALERS LICENSE.” The lower left quadrant of the plate is occupied first by the license number, followed by a small “N.M.” stacked over the “1920” date. The date is surrounded by three small rivet holes for mounting the date seals for subsequent years.

The 1913 motor vehicle law and 1915 Compilation both required that the name of the dealer or his company be on the dealer plate, along with the word “DEALER.” The 1919 law itself was silent on this requirement, but the repeal clause of the 1919 law revoked only those “parts of [prior] laws in conflict with the provisions of” the 1919 law. Thus, the requirement for the dealer’s name to be on the plate was still in force during the porcelain era.

Consequently, the entire lower right quadrant of the porcelain dealer plate is left blank to allow for the dealer to post his name, or that of his business, in this otherwise unused part of the plate. Ironically, though, and like the embossed plates before them (excepting, of course, 1915), not a single one of these porcelain dealer plates has ever been found with a name occupying that area. Admittedly, however, anything written or painted on porcelain could easily have come off within a few years.

As of July 1, 1923, a total of 261 porcelain dealer licenses had been issued to that point in time, only 136 of which were currently active. [*New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1923*] It is estimated that by the end of 1923 perhaps another 40 dealer’s licenses had been issued, bringing the highest plate number issued to about 300 at the end of their four years of use.

For more details on porcelain dealer plates and their annual renewal seals, please see the chapter on “Porcelains.”

## 1924-1925

Collectively, the 1916-1923 dealer plates were the largest tags ever issued by New Mexico, then or later. The return to embossed plates in 1924 brought about a degree of simplification, part of which was that hereafter dealer plates would always be the same size as passenger car plates.

One surviving dealer plate is known for 1924, and it looks much like the 1924 Highway Department plate, but with the word “DEALER” at the bottom of the plate. These two types also have distinct similarities to the 1924 Trailer, Commercial Car and Commercial Truck plates. And the dealer tags may well turn out to be in pairs for the first time, as this was the year that introduced pairs for passenger plates. Finding such a pair will be no easy task, however, as there were only 88 Dealer licenses in force as of June 1, 1924 [*Motor Vehicle Register 1924*].

The 1925 plate, for this one year only, had to accommodate the chosen means of uniquely differentiating the front and rear plates, which was to emboss vertically on the left side the word “FRONT” on one of them, and “REAR” on the other, not to mention the word “DEALER” at the bottom. This left only the right hand side for placement of a stacked “NM” over the two-digit year “25.”

## 1926 and Later

The *Laws of 1923* omitted any requirement that dealer plates carry the word “DEALER,” and a further simplified design was introduced in 1926, which would continue uninterrupted for a half century. From here on out, dealer plates would look like passenger plates, but with the letter “D” as a prefix to the serial number. The permissibility of this design was later explicitly codified in the *Laws of 1929*, Chapter 119, § 19(a), which said that either the word “DEALER or a distinguishing symbol” could be used. The letter “D,” of course, is the distinguishing symbol.

This format did not change until 1975, at which time the prefix was slightly modified to read “DL.” (There were to be several subsequent modifications of the prefix, and even a return to inclusion of the word “DEALER” in the 1980s and 1990s.)

## 1943

Dealer tags were issued as metal plates in 1943, rather than the windshield stickers that cars and trucks received. [*Albuquerque Journal*, Dec. 12, 1942, p.5, c.8] This is perfectly logical considering the intended purpose of dealer plates, and their

manner of use. However, as no cars were manufactured during the war for civilian consumption, new car dealers had nothing to sell. Probably no more than a handful of these plates would have been made and they are presumed to have been quite rare even when new. None are known to exist now.

### **1950 and later**

Sometime during or prior to 1939, dealer plates began appearing with a number preceding the “D” prefix, though this was not commonly seen until the 1950s. This number indicates the quantity of plates issued to a particular dealer, or probably more accurately stated, uniquely identifies each of several plates issued to a dealer who received more than one plate under his license. [Department of Motor Vehicles Press Release, Benny E. Sanchez, Commissioner, July 31, 1964]

At least some of the 1951 dealer plates have square corners, which are very unusual and quite sharp. Whether all dealer plates for this year were made in this fashion is unknown.

## **Used Car Dealer Plates**

Prior to 1929 New Mexico’s motor vehicle laws made no distinction between dealers selling new cars and those selling used cars. This changed with the enactment of the *Laws of 1929*, wherein Chapter 121 is entitled, in part, “An Act ... To Provide for the Licensing of Dealers in Used Motor Vehicles....” This legislation became effective January 1, 1930, and the applicable parts of the law are found in Sections 14-16.

Used car dealers were thus categorized as a separate class, and with a separate licensing fee of only \$5 (as compared to \$50 for new car dealers). But the law further stipulated that the motor vehicle department would issue a used car dealer license only “... when satisfied that the applicant is of good character ...” Used car dealers clearly had already established a certain reputation early in the history of motor vehicles.

By 1931 (and probably beginning in 1930, for which the records have not been found) the registration records include two different sections for dealer plates—one called “Dealers Registrations” and one called “Dealer in Used Car Registrations.”

For 1933 and 1934 “Dealers Registrations” (i.e., the new car dealers), the plates are numbered consecutively, D-1, D-2, D-3, etc. For the “Dealer in Used Car Registrations”—and this is where it gets interesting—the plates are numbered consecutively, D-1, D-2, D-3, etc. In other words, the license numbers are duplicated in the two categories!

There are no known dealer plates within a given year of differing colors or designs, and it is not likely that they simply haven’t yet been found as used car dealers outnumbered new car dealers in almost all years.

So how could this be possible? As we shall see, it wasn’t. In the 1931, 1936, 1937, and 1938 records (registrations for 1932 and 1935 have not been located), the Dealer (new car) plates are numbered starting with D-1, but the Used Car Dealer plates have no prefix at all—they are simply numbered starting with “1”.

The most likely scenario was that the “D” on the used car numbers in 1933 and 1934 was just a notation in the registration records, and was not actually a license plate number. But in that case, what did these plates look like? Or were there even any plates at all? Was it just a numbered paper license that the used car dealer kept in his possession?

One thing supporting this latter possibility is that all the way up until 1979 New Mexico was a plate-to-car state, meaning that the plate went with the car when sold. The transfer fee to the next buyer was just \$1 for a long time. So a used car would already have a regular plate on it from the previous owner. Hence, there would be no need for a Dealer plate to be displayed on a used car at all, and therefore no need for used car dealers to have dealer plates.

The Comptroller’s biennial reports answer the question definitively, showing that new car dealers were issued “Dealer License Plates,” while used car dealers were issued “Used Car Dealer License *Certificates*.” [Biennial Report of the Comptroller’s Department ... for the Nineteenth and Twentieth Fiscal Years, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 34 (FY 1931 and FY 1932), and Biennial Report of the State Comptroller for the Twenty-First and Twenty-Second Fiscal Years, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 131 (FY 1933 and FY 1934)]

Registration records, incidentally, show that a number of dealers held both new car and used car dealer licenses in some years. This is further proof that the two licenses were distinct, and having a new car license didn’t automatically entitle you to sell used cars.

## Modern Dealer Plates

Dealer plates issued after 1955 used essentially the same format as had been introduced in 1927, and would continue to do so until 1975 when the prefix was changed from “D” to “DL.” Twenty years later, in about 1994, the “L” was dropped and the prefix reverted to the old single letter “D.”

Although multi-year plates using renewal stickers debuted on passenger cars and other vehicles in 1960, dealer plates were a unique holdout in that new base plates with embossed dates were issued every year through 1968. Not only that, in the five years from 1960 through 1964, inclusive, these plates were in colors which were used on no other New Mexico tags. The first two years that dealer plates did use stickers, 1969 and 1970, saw these stickers themselves bear the word “DEALER.” Annually issued embossed-date plates reappeared in 1971 and, excepting 1976, were issued through 1982.

All dealer plates issued after 1982 have been undated, and validated with stickers. The stickers for the years 1984 through 1988, inclusive, bear the word “VENDOR.” Dealer plates were not brought under the staggered registration system introduced in April 1982, however, and to this day continue to expire in December, as they have since 1913. Consequently, all Dealer plate stickers since 1983 bear a December expiration (excepting the 1984-1988 VENDOR stickers which showed only the year of expiration).

## Dealer Plate Abuses

Early on, there had been some problems with the use and abuse of dealer plates. Contemporary news reports indicate that the two most common offenses were the display of dealer plates on cars being used for personal or business use, thereby evading regular registration fees on those vehicles (a nefarious practice still seen on New Mexico roads today); and the use of the cheaper “duplicate” dealer plates by sales locations owned by the same person, but in different cities.

Ultimately, state authorities asked for and received an opinion from the State Attorney General, who said that “such license should be placed by the dealer on cars in every city that he has an office, that such tag can be used only for demonstration purposes, and that a different license tag must be taken out for each different make of car, and that on extra cars, or more than one car of a certain type, a user’s license must be paid.” [*Deming Headlight*, May 30, 1919, p.2, c.2] A similar article in the Santa Fe New Mexican pointed out that the ruling was based on the 1915 [*Compilation of the*] *Laws of New Mexico* (which were essentially identical to the *Laws of 1913*). [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 19, 1919, p.3, c.3]

Not only did the ruling put an end to the multi-city problem, but dealers were now required to take out a separate license for each make of car offered for sale. Miscreant dealers had been slapped with a triple whammy.

## Dealer License Fees

Dealer's licenses were not cheap in the early days, and the fee escalated several times in the first decade after they were introduced. The table below shows the changing annual license fee during this period, the cost of each extra plate, and the equivalent of the annual license fee in 2020 dollars, adjusted for inflation.

**Dealer's License Fees 1913-1929**

<u>Years</u>	<u>Annual Fee</u>	<u>Extra Plate</u>	<u>Annual Fee in 2020 \$</u>	<u>Extra Plate in 2020 \$</u>
1913–1919	\$12.00	\$ 1.00	\$317.00	\$ 26.00
1920–1923	\$25.00	\$ 5.00	\$329.00	\$ 62.00
1923–1929	\$50.00	\$10.00	\$759.00	\$152.00

## Numbers of Dealer Licenses Issued in Selected Years

<u>Year</u>	<u>New Car</u>	<u>Used Car</u>
1913	23	
1914	79	
1915	80	
1916	128	
1923	136	
1924	88	
1928	199	
1931	136	51
1933	99	82
1934	106	124
1935	125	138
1936	150	171
1937	154	211
1938	150	243

### Notes:

1. New Car and Used Car dealers were not licensed separately until 1930.
2. Figures for 1913-1916 are final end-of-year tabulations. Figures for 1923 and later are mostly mid-year figures.

## **Demonstration Permits**

Dealer plates are not often seen nowadays, having been largely supplanted over the past decade or so by the Demonstration Permit. Serving the same purpose as dealer plates did in past years, Demonstration Permits are in most cases printed out by computer right at the dealership, and are unique to each vehicle by virtue of having the vehicle's VIN printed thereon.

Printed on plain white paper, then typically enclosed in a protective cover akin to a document or sheet protector, they are securely fastened to the vehicle's rear license plate holder. Demonstration Permits have an appearance not altogether different from the 30-day temporary tags that are provided to a buyer when a vehicle is purchased, for use until the vehicle can be permanently registered.

In terms of versatility and convenience to both the dealer and the prospective buyer, Demonstration Permits are clearly superior to metal dealer plates that had to be moved from one vehicle to another each time a test drive was to be taken. If dealer plates are seldom seen now, it is not hard to envision their complete disappearance in the not-too-distant future.

**Registration Data for Selected Dealer Plates  
Illustrated in this Chapter  
and on our companion website at  
NMplates.com/Dealer.htm**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Plate #</u></b>	<b><u>Registered To</u></b>
1915	14	Willis D. Newton, Las Cruces
1916	62	Roy Garage & Livery, Roy
1920	2	Jones & Lindley, Clovis
1920	110	P.H. Sammons, Clovis
1922	261	Womack Swatz Motor Co., Clovis
1923	24	Santa Fe Motor Co., Santa Fe
1928	D-180	Guillon Chevrolet Co., Tularosa
1931	D-140	Unissued.
1933	D-106	Unissued.
1934	D-80	Guy Chevrolet Co., Artesia
1935	D-68	Bassett Brothers, Silver City
1937	D-108	Hubbard & Hull, Raton
1938	D-37	Hunter Motor Co., Española

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

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# Driverless Car

Nothing so exotic as the robotic contraption that the term might conjure up today, “Driverless Car” was simply the name used in the 1920s and ’30s (in New Mexico, at least) for a rental car. Not until 1929, however, did the New Mexico legislature provide a formal definition:

“**Driverless Cars.**’ Motor Vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, for the operation of which no driver is furnished the lessor thereof.” [1929 Laws of New Mexico, Chapter 119, § 1]

Categorized as commercial vehicles, they were never very numerous, and virtually all of them were located in Albuquerque during the period this classification existed. Presumably they would have used COM CAR plates 1923-1925, and COM plates with either a “CAR” or a “DRIVERLESS” seal (“tab”) through the remainder of the 1920s.

The *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1931* shows at least eight rental car registrations in the commercial vehicle listings, all erroneously designated as “TAXI.” These plates apparently did, however, receive their correct “DRIVERLESS” seals, and one of these, plate #185, is illustrated in this chapter, and on our companion website at: [NMplates.com/Driverless.htm](http://NMplates.com/Driverless.htm). In a separate section of the 1931 License Directory publication, 37 additional Driverless, or “DRL” cars are listed correctly, but oddly, showing them as having been issued regular passenger car plates, mostly in the 52,000 and 69,000 series.

In the subsequent years of the C-prefix commercial plates, Driverless cars received this type of plate along with taxis and buses, with the attached tab bearing the “DRIVERLESS” designation, along with the usual weight and capacity figures. They appear in the “Commercial” vehicle section of the *Automobile License Directories* for this period, mixed in with BUS and TAXI registrations, under the code “DRL.” The designation continued at least as late as 1938. [New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1938, Volume III, p. 33]

As noted above, the vast majority of Driverless Cars were located in Albuquerque, and the three largest rental companies in that city were these:

White Star Driverless Car Company, 512 West Central [Albuquerque Journal, August 21, 1929, p.6, c.5]; U-Drive-It Co., across the street at 505 West Central Avenue [Albuquerque Journal, April 20, 1930, p.2, c.1]; and B. & M. Driverless Car Company, centrally located downtown at 115 North Third Street. [Albuquerque Journal, July 26, 1932, p.8, c.7]

It is uncertain when the “Driverless” designation ended, but a DMV publication used the term as late as 1984. [New Mexico License Plates - 1984 Edition, New Mexico Transportation Department, TAS-10263, Rev. 12/83]

Given below are the numbers of Driverless vehicles licensed during the years for which records are available. Some of these figures may have been tabulated before year end, such that the actual totals could have been somewhat higher. Even though each vehicle received two plates, there were probably fewer than 2,000 of these tags issued during the two decades or so that the Driverless designation was in use.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Driverless Vehicles Registered</u>
1931	45
1933	34
1934	37
1935	43
1936	61
1937	57
1938	33

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# First Automobile in New Mexico

On the front page of the *Santa Fe New Mexican* for April 30, 1900, there appeared a short and relatively inconspicuous story at the bottom of column 5, announcing the arrival of an automobile at Taos, about 60 miles to the north of the capital city of Santa Fe. Decades later, claims were made to the effect that this was the very first automobile in New Mexico, and that the car was driven there from out-of-state.

While the first part of the claim is entirely plausible, we find it highly unlikely that the car was driven there from anywhere. There simply were no suitable roads at that time, and even if there had been, there were insufficient places along such a long route where gasoline could have been obtained. More likely, the car was delivered by rail. Here is what the newspaper article said:

**“Automobile in Taos County** — Dr. T.P. Martin, secretary of the New Mexico Board of Health, and for years a practicing physician at Taos, recently received from Denver a strictly up-to-date automobile, or gasoline carriage, which he intends to use in making trips over the comparatively level road between Taos and the railroad station at Tres Piedras. The distance is about forty-nine miles, and can be covered with the automobile at the rate of fourteen miles per hour. It is expected that the doctor will ride into the capital city on his new carriage before many weeks.”

(It’s true that the road between Taos and Tres Piedras is comparatively level, but only if you don’t count the excruciating 650-foot grind down into, and then back out of, the Rio Grande Gorge—an unavoidable part of the journey until the “High Bridge” was opened on U.S. 64 in the summer of 1965.)

Dr. Thomas Paul Martin, known locally as “Doc Martin,” was a prominent figure in Taos, where he was the first physician in the county. His historic house still stands, now the site of the Taos Inn and Doc Martin's Restaurant.

There was much that was unsaid in the newspaper article about this historic automobile, including what make it was. One thing we know for sure is that it would be at least ten years before Dr. Martin would have had to buy a license plate for it, and then only if he drove it to Santa Fe and stayed there for more than ten days. But was it the first auto in New Mexico? It turns out that there is more than one claimant to this honor.

Another story says that R.L. Dodson of Albuquerque traveled to Denver, where he purchased a Locomobile in the latter part of 1897, and drove it back to Albuquerque over a period of five days. There are a few problems with this legend, too—not the least of which is the fact that the first Locomobile wasn't even built until 1899.

Moreover, the Locomobile was a steam car, and steam cars of that period typically could travel only about 20 miles on one tank of water before having to refill the boiler, not to mention having to frequently obtain both kerosene and gasoline to run the main and pilot burners. Upon first learning of the story some years ago, my feeling was that if it was unlikely that Doc Martin drove a gasoline car from Denver to Taos, it was even more unlikely that Dodson drove a steam car from Denver to Albuquerque during that same era, though not impossible.

There exists a photograph purporting to show Dodson driving the Locomobile in Albuquerque, and while the vehicle does appear to be an early tiller-steered Locomobile, it can't possibly be any earlier than an 1899 model since there were none made earlier—and very few were made even in 1899. Consultation with steam car experts, and reference sources such as the *Standard Catalog of American Cars*, points to a determination that the pictured vehicle is a 1900 model.

Dodson's great grandson, Doug Sylvester of La Jolla, California, became interested in the story a few years ago, and worked to set the record straight. With the assistance of the Historic Preservation Division of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs in Santa Fe, much more was learned about the event. First of all, it turns out that Dodson's initials had been erroneously recorded in several places as "J.L." In fact, his full name was Robert L. Dodson, and Sylvester refers to him by his correct initials of "R.L."

Contemporary news reports were also unearthed which positively establish that Dodson did in fact make the trip from Denver to Albuquerque, by way of the Raton Pass, and that the automobile was indeed a 1900 model Locomobile. The most significant article comes from the *Albuquerque Daily Citizen* for Thursday, December 6, 1900, p.1, c.4. It begins with a dispatch from the *Raton Reporter*:

**"Dodson's Automobile.** The first horseless carriage seen in Raton was upon the streets Friday about 9 o'clock. It is what is known as the locomobile, using gasoline for fuel and steam for motive power. The machine attracted the attention of all passers by and as it moved gracefully and noiselessly out of town. First Street was lined with lookers-on. R.L. Dodson of Albuquerque, owner of the machine, and B.L. Camwell, agent of the manufacturer, were the occupants of the carriage and were en route from Denver to Albuquerque. — Raton Reporter.

“Mr. Dodson rode on the machine as far as Ribera station in San Miguel County, when the machine ran out of gasoline and he came on to Lamy junction where he purchased gasoline, sending it back to Ribera. Mr. Dodson then came to Albuquerque, arriving here Monday night. Camwell, in charge of the machine, passed through Cerrillos yesterday afternoon at 2 o’clock, and is now overdue in reaching the city.”

Assuming that the article’s reference to “Friday” was the immediately preceding Friday, that would have placed Dodson and the Locomobile in Raton on November 30, 1900. He would have had to have left Denver at least several days—or perhaps even a week or more—earlier. Dodson’s arrival in Albuquerque on Monday (without the automobile) would have been December 3, 1900, with Camwell passing through Cerrillos on December 5.

No information has yet been located to positively confirm when Mr. Camwell finally showed up in Albuquerque, but it must have been within a few days after Dodson got there. (Dodson had probably traveled by train from Ribera Station to Lamy, and then also on to Albuquerque, but we don’t have confirmation of that.)

While the Martin and Dodson cars arrived in the state some seven months apart, that still puts them in a virtual tie for first-car-in-New-Mexico honors (along with perhaps others, unknown). The federal Office of Public Road Inquiries estimated at the time that by the end of 1900 there were no more than ten automobiles in all of New Mexico. At the very least, Doc Martin’s gasoline carriage and R.L. Dodson’s steamer were both among those first ten, and neither of them had to worry about getting a license plate for another decade.

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

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When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/FirstAutomobile.htm>

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# First Issues

In anticipation of being granted statehood in the coming year, the New Mexico Territorial Legislature skipped what would have been its 39th Legislative Session in 1911. President William Howard Taft signed the New Mexico statehood bill on January 6, 1912, and the First Regular Session of the New Mexico State Legislature convened at the capital city of Santa Fe on March 11, 1912. The session adjourned just three months later, on June 8, 1912, but during that period Senate Bill No. 164 was passed and signed into law to become the state's first automobile license law, as Chapter 28 of the *1912 Laws of New Mexico*.

The law mandated that automobile owners were to make application to the Secretary of State, along with payment of a ten dollar annual fee regardless of the size of the vehicle. (There was no mention of licensing any type of motor vehicle other than automobiles, an oversight that would be corrected the following year during the 1913 session of the Legislature.) In return, the Secretary was to issue "consecutively numbered" state licenses (i.e., what we would now call the registration certificates), and "furnish to the licensee one metal tag or plate bearing the initials 'N.M.' and the number corresponding to that license."

No other specifics were stated, but the embossed 5½ inch by 12½ inch plates acquired for the purpose were undated and carried green numerals and letters on a white background. The layout of the plate was fairly straightforward, consisting of the embossed serial number followed by a large embossed, staggered and stacked "NM" at the far right side of the plate. It is known from at least seven surviving examples that plates with 3-digit serial numbers had a hyphen (dash) between the number and the "NM," but we can only guess as to the arrangement of 2-digit and 1-digit plates, as none of those are known to exist today.

The Secretary of State's initial order was for 1,600 of these plates, at a cost of \$248.00, or 15½ cents each. [*Report of Secretary of State [Antonio Lucero] ... for the Period ending November 20th, 1912*, p.16] Sometime after November 30, 1912, an additional quantity was purchased. Based on the highest known surviving plate number of 2087 (an unissued plate), we can surmise that the second purchase was for 500 additional plates, bringing the total to 2,100. (Incidentally, high numbered first-issue plates are known to have their bolt holes and slots slightly closer to the corners than low numbered plates, and it would not be surprising to learn that this change occurred with the second order, i.e., beginning at plate #1601.)

These first-issue plates had a unique form of construction, wherein all four edges were bent over to the back side and crimped. This method served to

eliminate the sharp edge of the relatively thin sheet metal of which they were made, and at the same time added a degree of stiffening to the plate, as these plates did not have an embossed edge as later tags would have.

1912 plate #114 is reported to be lacking these folded edges, but if so, it is not clear whether it was manufactured this way, or if the edges have been trimmed off. In any case, plate #201, the next lowest numbered known plate, does have the folded edges, as do all others with higher numbers. (Beginning in 1914 the plates were made of a heavier gauge metal and with an embossed border, which eliminated the need for the folded and crimped edges.) New Mexico did not begin manufacturing its own plates at the State Penitentiary until late 1933 [*New Mexico Magazine*, August 1933, p. 38], and these 1912 plates were purchased from a private contractor, confirmed to have been the S.G. Adams Co. of St. Louis, Missouri. (Please see the chapter on “Manufacturers” for more details.)

As registrations came in, they were recorded in pen-and-ink in a large ledger book which remained in use through the end of 1914. [*Automobile License Record 1912-1914.*]

The first registration, for license plate #1, was recorded on August 16, 1912, with that plate going to Louis C. Ilfeld of Las Vegas, New Mexico, for his Velie automobile. Ilfeld's many business ventures, and those of his father and other relatives, were well entrenched throughout New Mexico, likely making them the richest family in the state. Through these connections Louis had enough stature to ensure himself being issued the coveted #1 plate. (Up into at least the 1950s, previous holders of a particular plate number were permitted to request and receive the same number in succeeding years. Subsequent registration records confirm that Ilfeld held onto plate #1 through at least 1923.)

In various past accounts of New Mexico's first issue plates, it has been reported that Thomas B. Catron, one of the state's first two U.S. Senators, was so upset with not having received plate #1 for himself that he demanded that a special plate numbered “1-A” be made especially for him. Just how this tale originated is unknown, but in the 1912 ledger, there is in fact an entry dated October 31, 1912, for a plate #1-A, and added in the top margin of the page, above the first regular entry, i.e., just above the entry for plate #1 for Louis C. Ilfeld.

However, this added plate was not issued to Thomas B. Catron, but to a Mrs. C.C. Catron. In those days, "C.C." would almost certainly have been the initials of the husband, and they don't match the "T.B." of Senator Catron. Furthermore, even if they are his wife's initials, her name was Julia Anna Walz Catron, and she died in 1909. So her initials don't match, and she was no longer living in 1912. [*New Mexico Office of the State Historian, Fairview Cemetery records, Santa Fe, N.M.*] (There could have been a second wife, but I have not found any record of one.)



On the other hand, Catron's second son was named Charles C. Catron. Here the initials match, and the plate could have been for his wife, Isabel Justine Christensen Catron, who would have been about 32 years old in 1912. [Fairview Cemetery records.] That could have been the Catron who got the plate, but one wonders why the Senator would have gone to all that trouble to get 1-A for his daughter-in-law rather than for himself.

The plates issued in 1912 were to be renewed annually, and "Upon payment of said fee of ten (10) dollars, the Secretary of State shall annually, within thirty (30) days from and after the first day of November, issue to such owner a renewal certificate which shall bear the same number as the original license." There was no provision to issue a new license plate, and since the number of the license remained the same it was obvious that the intent was that the vehicle owner was to use the original plate indefinitely.

The later 1913 law stipulated that "All licenses issued under the provisions of Chapter 28, Laws of 1912, are extended, without further application or payment of any additional fee on the part of the owners or operators of such motor vehicles, to December 31st, 1913, and persons holding such licenses and numbers are permitted to use the same until such date." So even though motorists who bought plates in 1912 were expecting to have to spend another \$10 to renew for 1913, they ended up getting a free renewal. (The 1913 law became effective March 15, 1913.) [Report of the Secretary of State Antonio Lucero for the Two Years Including November 30th, 1914, p. 12. These were the First and Second Fiscal Years, FY 1913 and FY 1914]

As simple as this sounds, a careful reading of the 1912 and 1913 laws reveals that for the registrants it was a little more complex. The 1912 law originally established the annual license period as November 1 through October 31 of the following year. (The license plates were placed on sale earlier, on August 16, 1912.) The 1913 law, which became effective March 15, 1913, changed the period such that it ran from January 1 through December 31. The registrations paid under the 1912 law, i.e., those purchased through March 14, 1913, and which were set to expire on October 31, 1913, were given an extension to December 31. So the "free renewal" mentioned above was really only a two-month gratis period.

The last plate issued in 1912 was #904. First-issue plates numbered 1 to 904, therefore, are 1912 plates, and those numbered 905 to 1898 are 1913 plates.

Plates numbered 1 to 1009 were issued under the 1912 law with an October 31, 1913, expiration but later received the two-month extension to December 31. Those numbered 1010 to 1898 were issued under the 1913 law and carried the December 31, 1913, expiration upon issue.

Registrations at the transition points are shown in the following table:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1    | issued on August 16, 1912, to Louis C. Ilfeld of Las Vegas for his Velie tonneau.    |
| 904  | issued on December 31, 1912, to H.C. Medley of Puertecito for an E.M.F. touring car. |
| 905  | issued on January 2, 1913, to H.L. Muncy of Artesia for a 5-passenger Ford.          |
| 1009 | issued on March 13, 1913, to F.L. Cox of Silver City, for a 34 H.P. Buick runabout.  |
| 1010 | issued on March 15, 1913, to M.E. Benson of Deming, for a 20 H.P. Reo touring car.   |
| 1898 | issued on December 22, 1913, to J. Lewis Brown of Deming for his Paiges touring car. |

The explosive increase in the number of automobiles is dramatically illustrated by the 1912-1913 registration figures. There were 904 cars at the end of 1912, and more than double that number just a year later. (Remember that all 1912 registrations were still active (less whatever few cars had been wrecked or junked), hence the total of 1,898 cars at the end of 1913.)

Left unsaid in the 1912 law, but clarified in the 1913 law, was that when ownership of an automobile was transferred, the license plate went with the car, and the license thereof was transferred to the new owner. This is further evidence that the total number of plates issued was an accurate indicator of how many cars there were in the state during this time period.

Previously published reports stating that 2,560 of the 1912-1913 plates were issued are clearly erroneous. There were only 1,898 issued, period. (Plus one more, if you count #1-A). There were obviously some unissued plates left over, as a few examples numbering almost as high as 2,100 are known to be in the hands of collectors. Surprisingly, none of the known unissued plates have original paint, perhaps because they resided in a trash heap for a number of years before being rescued.

At some point it was apparently realized that using the same plate for multiple years was a mistake, since there was no way to tell by looking at the plate itself if the renewal fee had been paid (especially since the plates were undated). The 1913 law fixed this problem by directing that "The Secretary of State shall adopt a different color each year for the number plate." A side effect of this provision was that a run of New Mexico plates is considered by many to be the most colorful of any state. The same law specified a minimum size for the plates (5" x 10"), but said nothing about including the year. Beginning in 1914, though,

the two-digit year was added in the lower right hand corner. An undated passenger plate would not be used again until nearly a half century later, in 1961.

The 1912 law provided a means to assist the Secretary of State in identifying those who might attempt to evade registration and payment of the required fee. At that time, and for many years hence, automobiles in New Mexico were subject to property tax at the county level in the same fashion as real estate. Section 6 of the law, therefore, stipulated that once a year all County Assessors were to provide to the Secretary of State a list of all automobile owners in the respective counties. (This double taxation was lifted in 1929 when the state barred the assessment of property tax on any motor vehicle which was duly registered with the state. [*Laws of 1929*, Chapter 119, § 32])

Meanwhile, the 1912 automobile law permitted cities which licensed autos on a municipal basis to continue to do so, but only for residents of their own cities. This changed with the 1913 motor vehicle law, which prohibited local governments from requiring an additional license, but did permit them to record the state license number, and permitted them to charge a recording fee, “not to exceed 50 cents per annum.” [*Laws of 1913*, Chapter 19, Sec. 8.]

As noted earlier, the 1912 law was an “automobile” registration law, while the 1913 law was a “motor vehicle” registration law. Under the 1912 law, motorcycles and trucks escaped the registration requirement. This was rectified by the 1913 law, and not long after its effective date, the first motorcycle was registered on June 11, 1913. And during the remainder of that year a handful of trucks came to be registered, along with—inexplicably—one threshing machine.

Other than motorcycle and dealer plates, New Mexico at the time issued only one type of license plate, i.e., “automobile” plates. Trucks, for example, paid the same fees and received the same license plates as automobiles of similar weight and/or horsepower. This remained the status quo until commercial trucks were separated out in mid-1923. [*Laws of 1923*, Chapter 96.] The overlap was not completely eliminated until non-commercial trucks were also separated out by the *Laws of 1929*, effective with the 1930 plates. The consequence of this is that 1912 plates, plus early 1913 plates, are all passenger car plates, but any New Mexico license plate from the effective date of the 1913 law (March 15, 1913) through the end of 1929 could be either a car plate or a truck plate. The only way to tell them apart is to look them up by plate number in the registration records (at least for those years for which the registration records have survived).

Through all of this, New Mexico first-issue plates hold the distinction of being among the most difficult to find, and among the most sought-after by collectors.

## Historical Note About New Mexico's First Automobile Licensee

Charles (Karl) Ifeld was born in Homburg vor der Hohe, Germany, in 1847 and already had a good command of English when he emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1865 at the age of 18. Arriving in Santa Fe in August of that year, he quickly moved on to Taos where he entered into a profitable mercantile partnership with Adolph Letcher.

Within two years Ifeld and Letcher had pulled up stakes and moved to greener pastures—literally, as sheep and wool would become a large part of their enterprise in the future. The two settled in Las Vegas, New Mexico, where they prospered and undertook the commercial expansion that ultimately would reach to all corners of the state.

In the spring of 1873, at 26 years old, Charles Ifeld made a return journey to his hometown in Germany, where he met and proposed marriage to 19-year-old Adele Nordhaus. Charles returned to Las Vegas in November 1873, with Adele following to New York City in May. Charles then made the trip back to New York, where they were married on May 24, 1874.

Within a short time Charles and Adele had arrived in Las Vegas, where they were to enjoy a long life together. They had five children—all boys—the first of whom was Louis Charles Ifeld, born January 30, 1876.

Louis C. Ifeld studied law and by the time he was in his mid-20s had become attorney for his father's company. Through this position he shared in the untold wealth that flowed in daily from the company's holdings, which were not just in the wholesale and retail mercantile business, but included far-flung ranching and real estate operations. [All details from *The Charles Ifeld Company: A Study of the Rise and Decline of Mercantile Capitalism in New Mexico*, by William Jackson Parish, Harvard University Press, 1961, and from the Office of the New Mexico State Historian, Santa Fe, NM.]

Louis was then elected to the First State Legislature, serving as State Senator from District 3. It was during the First Session, March 11 to June 8, 1912, that Senate Bill No. 164 was passed and ultimately signed into law to become the state's first automobile license law, as Chapter 28 of the *1912 Laws of New Mexico*. When the final version of the Bill came up for vote on Friday, May 31, 1912, it passed by a vote of 20 to 4, with Senator Ifeld casting his "Aye" vote with the majority, whereupon Senate President E.C. deBaca, declared the Bill to have passed the Senate. [*Journal of the Senate, Proceedings of the First State Legislature, First Session, State of New Mexico, March 11 to June 8, 1912*]

As the owner of one of the first automobiles brought into the state, Louis C. Ifeld was clearly one who adapted quickly to this new invention. His position

of wealth and status, along with his political connections, were unquestionably key to his ability to wangle the very first state-issued automobile license, plate #1, on August 16, 1912 for his Velie car.

Louis Ifeld not only got the very first plate in the very first year, but he was able to do the same every subsequent year for over a decade. The last registration record we find for him is his #1 plate in 1923, registered to a 1916 Cadillac touring car, but there are probably later registrations which have not yet been located.

Ifeld's ownership of the Velie also coincided with at least part of the period that Las Vegas' municipal motor vehicle licensing ordinance was in effect, August 13, 1910, to March 15, 1913. It is virtually certain, therefore, that the car had also been issued a Las Vegas city license plate before the state license was received. That being the case, there would have been a period of time when the Velie sported both the city tag and the state tag at the same time. (See the chapter on "Pre-states" for more information on the Las Vegas municipal license plates.)

Louis C. Ifeld died in 1950 at the age of 74, after having lived through history's greatest period of technological advancement.

## County Census of Registered Vehicles 1912 - 1913

The table on this page shows the number of vehicles receiving New Mexico's 1912-1913 first-issue license plates in each county. At the time, the state had only 26 counties, with Catron, De Baca, Hidalgo, Harding, Lea, Los Alamos and Cibola all having been created after 1913.

Bernalillo	238
Chaves	389
Colfax	142
Curry	30
Doña Ana	87
Eddy	164
Grant	156
Guadalupe	8
Lincoln	44
Luna	95
McKinley	41
Mora	29
Otero	15
Quay	30
Rio Arriba	4
Roosevelt	34
San Juan	21
San Miguel	88
Sandoval	6
Santa Fe	81
Sierra	7
Socorro	83
Taos	5
Torrance	32
Union	57
Valencia	13

**Total: 1899**

## Census of Registered Vehicles, by Town, 1912 - 1913

New Mexico's first-issue plates were assigned to vehicles in 190 different towns, ranging from large municipalities to tiny villages in remote corners of the state. Their distribution is tabulated in complete detail below. A great many of the towns listed here were subsequently abandoned and have now completely disappeared from the face of the earth.

Alamogordo	9	Elida	1	Las Vegas	20	Rodeo	1
Albuquerque	236	Elmendorf	1	Leland	1	Roosevelt	1
Amistad	5	Elva	1	Leopold	2	Roswell	322
Ancho	2	Emery Gap	1	Lincoln	6	Roy	7
Anthony	1	Encino	3	Logan	1	Ruidoso	2
Aragon	1	Engle	1	Lordsburg	15	Salt Lake	1
Artesia	59	Estancia	10	Los Alamos	2	San Antonio	8
Aztec	10	Eunice	1	Los Lunas	3	San Marcial	8
Belen	6	Fairview	1	Loving	2	San Pedro	4
Bent	2	Farmington	9	Lovington	17	Santa Fe	73
Bernalillo	6	Fierro	5	Lucia	3	Santa Rita	13
Black Rock	1	Flora Vista	1	Luna	3	Santa Rosa	4
Bronco, TX	3	Folsom	6	Lykins	1	Sedan	2
Cambray	1	Fort Bayard	7	Magdalena	24	Sherman	2
Canutillo, TX	1	Fort Sumner	2	Malaga	2	Shiprock	1
Capitan	2	French	1	Manzano	2	Silver City	78
Carlsbad	66	Gage	1	Maxwell	5	Socorro	25
Carne	1	Gallegos	2	McIntosh	1	Solano	1
Carrillo	1	Gallup	29	Melrose	2	Springer	14
Carrizozo	15	Gardiner	4	Mesilla	3	State College	4
Central	2	Gibson	2	Mesilla Park	11	Steins	2
Chama	2	Gila	2	Miami	2	Stonehaven	1
Chico	3	Glencoe	2	Midway	1	Taos	5
Chloride	2	Grants	1	Mimbres	1	Taylor Spring	1
Cimarron	12	Greenfield	1	Mogollon	1	Tierra Amarilla	1
Clayton	30	Guy	1	Monument	3	Tinnie	1
Cliff	1	Hachita	7	Mora	1	Tohatchi	3
Clovis	27	Hagerman	19	Moriarty	1	Tucumcari	27
Colman	1	Hayden	2	Mountainair	2	Tularosa	2
Colmor	1	Hillsboro	2	Nadine	1	Tyrone	4
Columbus	8	Holman	1	Nara Visa	1	Valley Ranch	2
Corona	7	Hope	7	Nolan	1	Valley View	1
Crownpoint	1	Hurley	9	Ocate	3	Van Houten	5
Cuates	1	Ione	1	Old Albuquerque	2	Vanadium	1
Cubero	1	Isleta	1	Orange	1	Vaughn	1
Cuchillo	1	Kelly	5	Pasamonte	1	Vermejo Park	4
Cuervo	2	Kenna	3	Pearl	1	Wagon Mound	10
Cumberland	1	Kenton	1	Pecos	1	Warren	1
Datil	4	King	2	Picacho	2	Watrous	3
Dawson	16	Knowles	1	Plain	1	White Oaks	5
Dayton	6	Koehler	5	Plainview	1	White Signal	2
Deming	84	La Cueva	1	Portales	31	Whitewater	1
Des Moines	1	Laguna	2	Pueblito	1	Willard	7
Dexter	21	Lake Arthur	10	Puertecito	2	Zuni	3
Doña Ana	1	Lakewood	3	Ramah	1		
Dora	1	Lamy	2	Ranger Lake	2		
Dunlap	1	Lanark	1	Raton	65		
Duran	4	Las Cruces	62	Rincon	2		
E. Las Vegas	63			Rivera	1		
						<b>Total:</b>	<b>1899</b>

## Vehicle Makes in New Mexico, 1912 - 1913

Summarized below are the many brands of vehicles which appeared on New Mexico's registration rolls during the 1912-1913 first-issue period. In all, there were no fewer than 114 different makes, including one that was homemade. Of these, 41 were one-of-a-kind in the state. Ford, Buick, Overland and E.M.F. were the most popular, with these four together comprising 55% of the total.

### Numbers of Vehicles Registered, by Make, 1912-1913

Abbott	18	Everitt	2	Maxwell	21	Rider	1
Apperson	9	Flanders	25	Maxwell Briscoe	12	Salter	1
Auburn	3	Ford	468	Maytag	1	Schacht	6
Auto Parts	1	Ford truck	1	McIntyre	1	Sears Roebuck	7
Autocar	3	Franklin	10	Metz	19	Simplex	1
Bailey	1	Gale	1	Metzger	1	Smith	1
Baker	1	Gaylord	1	Michigan	6	Sommer	1
Barcholomero	1	Glide	1	Mitchell	13	Stanley Steamer	13
Bartholomew	3	Great Western	1	Moline	9	Staver	2
Briggs-Detroit	1	Havers	2	motor truck	1	Stevens Duryea	5
Briscoe	3	Haynes	14	Oakland	12	Stoddard Dayton	4
Brush	11	Henry	1	Ohio	9	Studebaker	88
Buick	287	homemade	1	Oldsmobile	11	Stutz	1
Cadillac	65	Hudson	14	Overland	152	Thomas	5
Cameron	1	Hupmobile	20	Packard	4	truck	1
Cartercar	27	Hupp	17	Paige	2	United Motors	2
Case	8	Illinois	1	Paige-Detroit	3	United States	1
Chalmers	35	Imperial	1	Pase Threshing		Velie	22
Clarke-Carter	2	International	2	Machine	1	Victor	1
Colburn	1	Inter-State	5	Pathfinder	4	Welch-Detroit	1
Cole	4	Jackson	9	Peerless	1	White	7
Columbus	3	Jeffery	2	Pennsylvania	1	Willys Overland	3
Courier	1	Kissel	9	Pierce Arrow	6	Winton	7
Crow	1	Lambert	1	Pope	5	Wylie	1
Demot	1	Lane	2	Pope Toledo	2	not specified, or	
Detroit	2	Liberty Brush	1	Premier	1	illegible	54
E.M.F.	136	Lozier	3	R.C.H.	9		
Elkhart	4	Marion	5	Rambler	3	<b>Total:</b>	<b>1899</b>
Elmore	3	Marquette	1	Regal	18		
Enger	7	Mason	5	Reo	66		



## Known Surviving New Mexico 1912-1913 First-Issue License Plates

Only about a score of New Mexico's 1912-1913 first-issue license plates are known to survive today, representing a little over one percent of those originally issued. Of these, perhaps a half-dozen or so are 1912 issues. The remainder were either issued in 1913, or were not issued at all. Listed below are most, but probably not all of these survivors, along with the original registration data associated with each one.

<u>Plate #</u>	<u>Date Issued</u>	<u>Owner</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Make &amp; Style</u>
114	Sep. 6, 1912	Carrier, Frank N.	Santa Rita	Apperson, 30 H.P. touring
201	Sep. 14, 1912	Miller, R. L.	Deming	Overland, 30 H.P. touring
206	Sep. 16, 1912	Luthy, J. F.	Albuquerque	Bartholomew, 40 H.P. touring
439	Oct. 3, 1912	Robers, Clair A.	Stonehaven	Overland, 20 H.P.
576	Oct. 22, 1912	Seward, Edwin P.	Chico	Overland 28 H.P. 2-seater
592	Oct. 24, 1912	Leupold, Mrs. Fanny	Deming	Ford, 20 H.P. model T
878	Dec. 17, 1912	Blevins, J. E.	E. Las Vegas	Buick, 20 H.P. 5-passenger
912	Jan. 4, 1913	Branson, J.F.	Des Moines	Buick, 16 H.P. runabout
1179	Jun. 17, 1913	McNaghten, A.S.	Emery Gap	Ford, 20 H.P. 5-passenger
1301	Jul. 3, 1913	Springer, Henry S.	Cimarron	Case, 40 H.P. touring
1594	Jul. 30, 1913	Hollinger, C.B.	Chloride	Ford, 20 H.P. 5-passenger
1728	Aug. 27, 1913	Papen, John A.	E. Las Vegas	Ford, 20 H.P. 5-passenger
1784	Sep. 16, 1913	Snyder, John	Tularosa	Buick, 25 H.P. touring
1885	Nov. 19, 1913	Carrvon, Frank	E. Las Vegas	Ford, 22 H.P. touring
1909	Not Issued			
1922	Not Issued			
1987	Not Issued			
2016	Not Issued.			
2061	Not Issued.			
2087	Not Issued			

## Errata

### 1912/13 Last Plate Number in previous editions of *Early New Mexico License Plates* book

A typographical error crept into the Third and earlier editions of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book, as well as the first printing of the Fourth Edition. The error is relatively minor, but was replicated in several places.

The last 1912/13 license plate issued was given in those earlier editions as number 1889. The last two digits are transposed, and the plate number should instead read as **1898**. In the first printing of the Fourth Edition, the error appears in the following chapters and pages:

- Ch. 2, p. 3      One occurrence in the first entry for 1913.
- Ch. 12, p. 3      Two occurrences, one in each of the last two paragraphs.
- Ch. 12, p. 4      One occurrence in the table at the top of the page.  
One occurrence in the first paragraph after the table.  
One occurrence in the next-to-the-last paragraph.
- Ch. 22, p. 2      One occurrence in the last paragraph. (The date given is correct.)
- Ch. 22, p. 3      One occurrence in the first paragraph.
- Ch. 50, in the first page of the spreadsheet, in the line for 1913: **Cars** should read 1,895; **Total** should read 2,075; **Notes** should read ... Cars+trks = 1,898 exact.

The same error occurs in the corresponding places in the earlier editions. They will be in the same chapters, and on the same, or very close to the same, pages. The difference is only 9 plates, but if you have one of the earlier editions you may want to lightly pencil a correction in your book at the places indicated above.

# Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/FirstIssues.htm>

# Governor – Lt. Governor

## and Other Early Political Plates

For a long time, being the governor of New Mexico didn't bring with it any special dispensation when it came to assignment of license plate numbers. When the state first began issuing license plates in 1912, plate #1 went not to the governor, but to Louis C. Ilfeld [*Automobile License Record 1912-1914*], a wealthy merchant in Las Vegas, New Mexico, and he was able to keep #1 at least all the way through 1923 [*Motor Vehicle Register 1923*].

Meanwhile, in 1916 W.J. McInnes, president of the First National Bank in Lake Arthur (near Roswell) snared plate #2 [*Automobile License Record 1916*], and—though he had not held the number prior to that year—he managed to hang onto it through 1923 [*Motor Vehicle Register 1923*].

### 1924

In 1924 James F. Hinkle became the first New Mexico Governor to be assigned plate number 1. This was not a distinctive Governor plate, per se, but the standard passenger plate number 1 which heretofore had been held by Louis Ilfeld [*Motor Vehicle Register 1924*]. Issued as a pair, the plates were registered to Hinkle's 1924 Studebaker sedan. Whether this came about because of an Act of the Legislature, an administrative decision within the Motor Vehicle Department, or an executive order from Hinkle himself, we have not been able to determine.

### 1925

Registration records for 1925 have not been located, but since the governor received plate #1 in both 1924 and 1926, it was almost certainly the case for 1925 as well. The only thing we don't know is which governor got it. Governor Hannett was elected in November 1924, and took office on January 1, 1925. However, the motor vehicle department began issuing the 1925 plates in December 1924, and motorists were required to have them on their vehicles by January 1, 1925.

Outgoing Governor Hinkle therefore may well have taken 1925 plate #1 for himself in December, leaving incoming Governor Hannett to the leftovers. Hannett would later do just that to his successor when he left office at the end of 1926.

## 1926

In 1926 Governor Arthur T. Hannett received plate #1, which he bolted onto his 1925 Cadillac coach. [*New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1926, Numerical List of Automobile Registration*]

It is important to understand that Hannett's #1 plate was not a Governor plate in the usual sense of the word. That is, it did not have the word GOVERNOR embossed on it. Instead, it was the regular passenger plate with the number "1" on it. In other words, it was the plate that Louis Ilfeld would have received had he not been displaced by the governor back in 1924.

## 1927

The same was true in 1927, with #1 again going to Governor Hannett's Cadillac. Since 1924, of course, these plates were in pairs, rather than being singles. [*Motor Vehicle Department Registration Book 1927*]

Hannett, who was a Democrat, was elected in November 1924 and took office January 1, 1925. [*New Mexico State Constitution, Article XX, Sec. 6, and Article V, Sec. 1, New Mexico Blue Book 1931-1932*] He served only one two-year term, being succeeded by Republican Richard C. Dillon on January 1, 1927. The 1927 plates, however, had been manufactured in 1926, and all had been issued by December 31, 1926, before Dillon was to take office. Hannett, therefore was able to get the 1927 plate #1 before Dillon could get his hands on it, and once Hannett had it, it was his for the remainder of 1927.

Incoming Governor Dillon ended up with plate #25 for 1927 (on a 1926 Packard sedan). However, once he was in office, he made arrangements for a special plate, #1A, to be made for his wife, which was issued to her own 1926 Packard sedan. [*Motor Vehicle Department Registration Book 1927*] In those days the plates were manufactured by commercial companies, and the 1927 plates had been made by the Gopher Stamp and Manufacturing Company of St. Paul, Minnesota (see the chapter on "Manufacturers" for more details). For the special #1A plate to have been made, a special order would have been sent to Gopher after all of (or at least the majority of) the contract had been filled. So Mrs. Dillon probably didn't get her new plate until a month or two into the new year.

While all of this was going on, Louis Ilfeld seems to have dropped out of sight. Plate #1 was no longer available, and Ilfeld does not show up in the registration records with any other low number. W.J. McInnes, the Roswell banker who had plate #2 since 1916, had meanwhile been bumped to #3 in 1926 (after having received high-numbered plates in 1924 and 1925), and Luis E. Armijo of Las Vegas now had #2 (on his 1925 Hudson coach). [Same sources as cited above.]

The fact that Ilfeld and Armijo were both from Las Vegas may indicate that there was a connection. Perhaps when Ilfeld lost #1, he was offered #2, but declined and asked that it go to Armijo. Whatever the case, McInnes was stuck with #3, but he must not have been too displeased, as (with one exception noted below) he kept the number all the way through 1952, even after the advent of county prefix numbers.

As already noted, the Governor plates for 1924 through 1927 were not any kind of special plate and did not bear the word "Governor." They were merely the first of the regular passenger plates, i.e., regular passenger plate #1, issued each year, and were simply assigned to the Governor in these years instead of to the wealthy big wigs who had managed to secure them previously.

From that standpoint one could successfully argue that they are not "Governor" plates at all, but just low-numbered passenger plates.

## 1928

The first true Governor plate was introduced in 1928 as a double Zia, bearing the word "GOVERNOR" across the top, and the number "1" in the center. The state name, spelled out in full, was across the bottom. Governor Dillon received this plate for his 1928 Packard sedan. He also received a regular passenger car plate with the number "1A" for a 1927 Packard sedan—in other words, the same number that his wife was given the previous year for her 1926 Packard. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1928.*] These plates, of course, were pairs.

(An earlier newspaper dispatch in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* for November 7, 1927 [p.2, c.3] had reported that Mrs. Dillon was to receive #01 for her car in 1928. Since #01 is known to have been used in 1929, it may be that the 1928 *Motor Vehicle Register* reference to "1A" is really referring to "01.")

And for the first time, the second in command received some special treatment. Lieutenant Governor Edward Sargent of Chama was given plate #2 for his 1926 Chrysler touring car. There was apparently no special notation on the plate indicating his position; this was simply the plate that W.J. McInnes had from 1916 to 1923, and which Luis Armijo held for 1926 and 1927.

Meanwhile, the regular automobile passenger plate #1 also resurfaced, this time registered to D.E. Barton of Albuquerque for his 1927 Stutz sedan. Nothing has been learned about just who Barton was, but as the owner of a Stutz, he was no doubt a person of means.

In summary, then, there were at least three #1 plates for 1928: Governor #1, regular automobile #1 and regular automobile #1A. If #01 and #1A were two different plates, then there were four #1 plates. [All details from *Motor Vehicle Register 1928*, and *Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 7, 1927, p.2, c.3]

## 1929-1930

Dillon was to remain in office for four years, through December 31, 1930, and he made the most of it with regard to license plates. For 1929 he again received GOVERNOR plate #1, in the same style as the 1928, but in 1929 colors. For his second car he received #01. Interestingly, there are three of each of the #1 and #01 plates in existence (and probably a fourth of each, waiting to be found). All appear to be absolutely genuine, and all appear to have spent time mounted on vehicles, suffering the indignities of New Mexico's unpaved roads. Perhaps this road rash prompted Governor Dillon to request that replacements be made for him, and, indeed, the paint on the third plate of each trio—though a close match—appears to be from a different dye lot.

The 1930 Governor plate continued in the same style as the two preceding years, with one important difference. Whereas passenger colors for 1930 were butterscotch on black, Governor Dillon's #1 plate was gold on black. His second car was given #0, also in gold on black.

## 1931

Governor Dillon's second and final term ended on December 31, 1930. Perhaps with a desire to avoid a repeat of the 1927 incident of the outgoing governor taking plate #1 with him, it was decided after the November elections that incoming Democratic Governor Arthur Seligman would be given plate #1 for 1931. Lt. Governor Andrew W. Hockenhull would get #2. Mrs. Seligman would get #1111 for her car, a number which she had already held for several years. Outgoing Governor Dillon applied for #3 and #4 for 1931. [*Albuquerque Journal*, November 30, 1930, p.3, c.1]

If the 1931 Governor and Lt. Governor plates have survived, they have not been seen in modern times. However, there is evidence to indicate that both of them—not just the GOVERNOR plate—were of special design. Neither one is shown in the regular automobile listings of the *Automobile License Register 1931*, but all of the regular plates, numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on, are there. That seems to imply that not only was the Governor plate made as a special type embossed "GOVERNOR," but perhaps the Lt. Governor plate was embossed accordingly, too.

Meanwhile, the *Automobile License Register 1931* does confirm that ex-Governor Dillon did get both the #3 and #4 plates for 1931, as he had requested the previous November. Mr. McInnes, who had been bumped out of #2 in 1926, had now been bumped out of #3, but he was to recover it in 1932.

(This information at last solves a long-standing mystery about the McInnes #3 plates, which were in the hands of an antique dealer in Roswell for many years until he sold them to a collector in the mid-1980s. At that time the run covered 1917-1949, but was missing a few years, including, significantly, 1931. For decades it was thought that the #3 plates for that year had been lost, or had been picked out by someone with a special interest in 1931. We now know that McInnes never had them in the first place, those plates having gone to ex-Governor Dillon instead, for that one year.)

## 1932

Governor Seligman proved to be an active promoter of motor transportation and the Good Roads movement. While in office during 1932 the governor staged a one-day drive from Raton Pass at the Colorado border, to Anthony, N.M. at the Texas state line. This dawn-to-dusk trip was remarkable at the time, if for no other reason than the fact that only 58 miles of road were paved out of the 520-mile total. Seligman made the trip in his wife's 1932 Cadillac, assigned New Mexico license plate #1111, the number mentioned previously and which she held for several years. [New Mexico Magazine, October 1932, pp. 6-7]

Presumably, Seligman had Governor plate #1, but as yet we have found no surviving photographs, nor have any of the 1932 registration records been located. The Comptroller's biennial report covering this year does exist, and while it shows a Lt. Governor plate having been issued for 1932, it makes no mention of a Governor plate. [Biennial Report of the Comptroller's Department ... for the Nineteenth and Twentieth Fiscal Years, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 34. (FY 1931 and FY 1932)] (The same report omits any mention of either a Governor plate or a Lt. Governor plate for 1931, though the contemporary news reports mentioned earlier indicate that both should exist.)

## 1933

The *Automobile License Directory 1933* shows plate "Gov. 01" as being assigned to Gov. Seligman, and plate "LT. 02" assigned to Lt. Governor Andrew W. Hockenhull for his 1929 Studebaker sedan. (No information is given for the governor's car.) Curiously, the Comptroller's biennial report confirms the Lt. Governor plate, but as in the case of the previous year, makes no mention of a Governor license plate. [Biennial Report of the State Comptroller for the Twenty-First and Twenty-Second Fiscal Years, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 131. (FY 1933 and FY 1934)]

The entries in the registration records are interpreted to mean that the governor's plate was embossed with the word "GOVERNOR," and that the number on that plate was "01". If so, perhaps the 2-digit number was used to avoid duplication with the civilian plate #1 for that year.

We can only guess at the appearance of the Lt. Governor's plate. Did they manage to squeeze in "LT. GOVERNOR" across the top? Based on the surviving 1936 Lt. Governor plate (see the photo later in this chapter), we would say, "yes."

## **1934**

Governor Seligman died in office of a heart attack shortly after addressing a meeting of the New Mexico State Bankers Association in Albuquerque on September 25, 1933. He was immediately succeeded in office by then-Lt. Governor Andrew W. Hockenhull. [*Clovis Evening News-Journal*, September 25, 1933, p.1, c.7]

The 1934 registration records show that Governor plate #1 had now been assigned to Hockenhull. As there was no provision at the time for automatic replacement of the Lt. Governor, the position was left open, and there is therefore no assignment of a plate to a Lt. Governor for 1934. [*Automobile License Directory 1934*] Further corroboration comes from the Comptroller's report, which shows no Lt. Governor plate issued for 1934. [*Biennial Report of the State Comptroller for the Twenty-First and Twenty-Second Fiscal Years*, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 131. (FY 1933 and FY 1934)]

## **1935**

Gov. Clyde Tingley took office on January 1, 1935, and served for four years. The Governor and Lt. Governor registration records for this year have not been located, but based on preceding and succeeding years, in all probability a Governor plate of the same format was issued for this year as well.

## **1936**

The 1936 Governor plate has not survived, or at least its whereabouts are not known, but we do have a photo of Gov. Tingley standing beside his 1936 Buick which sports the 1936 Governor plate #1 on the front bumper.

Part of the 1936 registration records have been located, but the listings for Governor and Lt. Governor do not appear in the section where they are normally found. Whether they were omitted by oversight, or are buried deep in some other part of the records is yet to be learned.

On the other hand, one of the two 1936 Lieutenant Governor plates has survived, if somewhat the worse for wear, and its appearance is exactly as would



be surmised from the registration listing that appears for this plate in the following year (see below). Embossed across the top is **Lt. GOVERNOR**, and it is double Zia plate #2. Having this evidence in hand, it is reasonable to suppose that all Lt. Governor plates with similar registration listings are also similar in appearance to this one, a supposition supported by the existence of the 1945 Lt. Governor plate in the identical format.

### 1937

Although their whereabouts today are not known—if they have even survived—the *Automobile License Directory 1937* shows special plates for both Governor Clyde Tingley and Lt. Governor Hiram M. Dow. They are listed this way:

Gov. 1	Governor Clyde Tingley, Albq, Buick, Club Sdn, 36
Lt. Gov 2	H.M. Dow, Roswell, Buick, cpe, 36

The Governor plate was in all likelihood the expected style, i.e., the same as that of the 1936 and 1938 plates seen in the photographs.

The special notation for Lt. Gov. Dow's plate supports the belief that his plate for 1937 was of the same format as that of 1936, as described above. Moreover, it is highly probable that the same layout was used in all years where the entries are similarly given in the registration records.

### 1938

The *Automobile License Directory 1938* shows special plates issued to the Governor and Lt. Governor, exactly as was the case the prior year:

Gov. 1	Governor Clyde Tingley, Albq, Buick, Sdn, 38
Lt. Gov 2	H.M. Dow, Roswell, Buick, cpe, 36

The only difference was that Governor Tingley had traded in his 1936 Buick for a 1938 model. And once again the nature of the registration listing is such that Dow's plate almost certainly bore the legend **Lt. GOVERNOR**.

Both of Gov. Tingley's 1938 Governor plates survive, both formerly in the author's collection, but one of which was donated to the State Museum in Santa Fe. These are of the same style as those from the known years before and after.

### 1939-1942

The same format of Governor plate which had been in use since 1928 was issued to John E. Miles for 1939 and 1940, with at least one of the 1939 plates

surviving today. And in circumstances reminiscent of Governor Dillon's 1929 #1 and #01 plates, three of the 1940 plates exist today, with probably a fourth still to be found. The extra pair was likely made for Governor Miles when the first pair became badly road worn. Though their whereabouts are not known, a photograph exists of his 1942 plate, and equivalent plates were in all likelihood issued to Miles in 1941 as well.

## **1943**

Up through at least 1946, each different type of New Mexico license plate started its serial number sequence at number 1, whether it was Passenger, Truck, Motorcycle, Mounted Patrol, Official, State Police, or whatever—in fact, more than a dozen types in all. This, it turned out, was not at all to the liking of Governor John Dempsey, who wanted to be the only person with a #1 plate. On January 7, 1943, just one week after taking office, he complained to the press that “There are altogether too many No. 1 plates in circulation now ... and the resulting confusion is immense. Every time someone sees a No. 1 car somewhere they think it is the governor's and the word goes out that the governor is in the vicinity. The result sometimes is that the governor is reported in five or six towns at once.”

Dempsey said that present holders would be asked to turn in their No. 1 plates and receive different numbers, while he, and he alone, would retain the only number 1 plate. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 7, 1943, p.1, c.5]

Whether the other number 1 folks did or did not turn in their plates is unknown, but the governor's complaint had to be in reference to the 1942 plates which were still on their cars after the 1943 windshield stickers were in use.

Governor Dempsey himself, however, would not have had a 1942 Governor plate #1, because he didn't take office until January 1, 1943. This implies that a metal 1943 Governor plate #1 had been made for Dempsey. Unless, of course, they made him a back-dated 1942 plate to go with a 1943 windshield sticker (which he would have demanded to be sticker #1, no doubt). In either case, the plate could have been either a single or a pair.

## **1944-1946**

While Governor Dempsey's 1945 plate survives today, his 1944 and 1946 plates are not known. Based on the history of earlier and later years, though, there is every reason to believe that they were issued, and that they were in the same format as the others.

## **1947-1952**

Gov. Thomas Mabry's 1947 Governor plate is the last one of the 1928-1947 style (i.e., those with the word “GOVERNOR” embossed into the metal)

known to still exist, and there are no known surviving motor vehicle registration records after this time with which to conduct research. Nonetheless, past history and other evidence suggests the likelihood that the same style of Governor plate was manufactured and issued up through at least 1952.

A 1949 newspaper report stated that “The No. 2 plate goes to the lieutenant governor,” but with no further details given. [*Las Cruces Sun-News*, December 22, 1949] We can only speculate as to whether it was embossed with the words “LT GOVERNOR,” but in any case it was likely distinctive in bearing only the numeral “2” without a county number prefix.

### **1953 and later**

After 1947 the next known extant Governor plate is the 1959 plate of Gov. John Burroughs. This tag is a flat plate, silk-screened onto a sheet of heavy-gauge aluminum. This style of plate was introduced in 1953 for issuance to state legislators, and we think it highly probable that the Governor plate was switched to this style in 1953 also. Please see the chapter on “Manufacturers” for more details.

Certainly no later than 1959 the Governor plates were being made in the flat, non-embossed silk-screened style with a single Zia before the numeral “1”. The 1959, 1960, and 1965 plates are all yellow on red, while 1967 is blue on white, all in the same flat style.

When renewal stickers were introduced for the first time, in 1960, Governor John Burroughs received the very first sticker, sticker #1, to put on his 1959 Governor plate #1. But there is a little more to the story than that, as can be seen by the photos of these plates later in this chapter. There are actually two of the #1 stickers, both of which were placed on just one of the plates. The 1959 and 1960 plates of Governor Burroughs were given to the author in 1988 by his widow, Jean, who provided the following explanation:

New Mexico had been using two plates up through 1959, but changed the requirement to just one plate beginning with 1960. New registrants were issued only one plate in 1960, and re-registrants were permitted to use only one of their 1959 plates if they so desired. And while regular passenger plates from 1959 exhibited “19” in the lower left corner and “59” in the right corner, the Governor’s plates from that year were made with a “59” in both corners, in the style of 1956 and 1957 passenger plates. Since he was required to use only one plate in 1960, Governor Burroughs elected to use both of the 1960 #1 stickers on a single plate, thereby covering up both appearances of the “59.” (News reports of the time, however, said that both (matching) 1959 plates had to be kept on the car, and that only one sticker was provided, specifically for the rear plate. [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, November 13, 1959, p.1, c.1] Whatever the case, Governor Burroughs, though, obviously received two stickers.)

The years for which New Mexico Governor and Lt. Governor plates are known to survive are these:

<b>Governor</b>	<b>Lt. Governor</b>
1927 Arthur Hannett (D)	1936 Luis C de Baca (D)
1928 Richard C. Dillon (R)	1945 James B. Jones (D)
1929 Richard C. Dillon (R)	1977 Robert E. Ferguson (D)
1930 Richard C. Dillon (R)	
1934 Andrew W. Hockenhull (D)	
1938 Clyde Tingley (D)	
1939 John E. Miles (D)	
1940 John E. Miles (D)	
1945 John J. Dempsey (D)	
1947 Thomas J. Mabry (D)	
1959 John Burroughs (D)	
1960 John Burroughs (D)	
1963 Jack M. Campbell (D)	
1965 Jack M. Campbell (D)	
1967 David E. Cargo (R)	
1974 Bruce King (D)	

### **Fake Governor plates**

There are many New Mexico Governor plates circulating that are from the late 1970s and later, and in particular from the 1980s. The same is true for New Mexico Lt. Governor and many other political office-holder plates from this general time period. For lack of a better word, almost all of these are fakes. Or, to be more charitable, they could be called “political samples” that were stamped out in large numbers and given away as souvenirs, none of them ever actually having seen the light of day on cars owned by the persons for whom the plates were allegedly made. (There are some exceptions, including quite a few legitimate post-1960s State Senator and State Representative plates. Unfortunately, though, they are extremely difficult to separate from the fakes/samples.)

## Other Early Political Plates

As mentioned above, and as described in more detail in the chapter on “Manufacturers,” political plates were first introduced in great profusion in 1953. A very few earlier examples are known to exist, however, including Secretary of State for 1945 and 1946, and Speaker of the House for 1945, 1946 and 1947.

Both of these types, for all years mentioned in the preceding paragraph, were recovered from dump sites, and appear to have been unissued when discarded. This leads us to believe that there were second thoughts about the issuance of the plates after they had been manufactured. In fact, grumbling about the existence and use of such plates had begun at least as early as 1946, and probably much earlier. Although Staff Officer tags were the focus of most of these complaints, legislation was introduced in early 1947 to eliminate all types of numbered special plates. The prohibition became law as Chapter 15 of the *1947 Laws of New Mexico*. Please see the chapter on “Staff Officer” for more background on how this all came about.

## Legislative Authorization of New Mexico’s Political Plates

No evidence has been found of legislation which specifically authorized either the first purpose-made N.M. Governor plates, which appeared in 1928, or the small number of other political plates which appeared in the 1940s (e.g., Secretary of State and Speaker of the House). They may have been made simply on the say-so of the State Comptroller or the Commissioner of Revenue, the officials who oversaw the Motor Vehicle Department at those respective times, but we have no definitive evidence of this, either.

The plates provided to members of the state legislature, on the other hand, have a documented history. As described in detail in the chapter on “Manufacturers,” special plates for State Senators and State Representatives first appeared in 1953 when they were made by the Hal Wolfe Screw Machine Products Co. of Portland, Oregon and presented to the lawmakers as a gift. Despite the fact that there was no law authorizing the use of such plates, and despite howls of protest that this was a thinly-veiled bribe by a company that wanted to secure a contract to sell plates of this type to the state in the future, the politicians kept and used the free plates. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, February 8, 1953, p.16, c1.]

There must have later been reconsideration about the tags, though, as no plates of this type are known for 1954. And it appears that by the time it occurred to anyone that perhaps measures should be taken to legalize the plates, the legislature had adjourned, not to reconvene until 1955. (The N.M. legislature met in only odd-numbered years.)

Once the 1955 session rolled around the solons passed a new law that explicitly authorized themselves to have special State Representative and State Senator license plates which identified the vehicle owners as such. The law also declared that this was an “emergency” situation such that “... for the protection of the public peace, health and safety of the inhabitants of the State of New Mexico ...” it was necessary that the law take effect immediately. [Laws of 1955, Chapter 113, approved March 11, 1955] Clearly, they were anxious to get their special plates.

Ensuring that their N.M. brethren in the United States Congress wouldn’t feel left out, the New Mexico body had a month earlier passed a law granting a similar privilege to them. [Laws of 1955, Chapter 11, approved February 8, 1955]

In view of the fact that in 1955 New Mexico had only two U.S. Senators and two U.S. Representatives, and that it was entirely optional that they obtain these plates in the first place, one can see that such tags would have to be exceptionally rare. Nonetheless, at least one example from 1955 does exist and is pictured later in this chapter, and on our companion NMplates.com website. Following the stipulation in the new law that on the plates “... shall be the name of the House of the United States Congress in which he serves followed by the number which indicates his seniority as compared with the other member or members of the same House of Congress from New Mexico” this plate bears the serial number US-SEN-2. Having served continually since 1935, the senior U.S. Senator in 1955 was Dennis Chávez. Clinton P. Anderson was first elected in 1949, thus being the junior Senator. The above information positively identifies the 1955 US-SEN-2 plate as having belonged to Senator Anderson.

These plates are so rare that the next known example dates from nearly two decades later.

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter’s text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following links:

<https://nmplates.com/GovernorAndLtGovernor.htm>  
<https://nmplates.com/StateRepresentative.htm>  
<https://nmplates.com/StateRepresentative.htm#SPKR>  
<https://nmplates.com/StateSenator.htm>  
<https://nmplates.com/StateSenator.htm#SpecOff>  
<https://nmplates.com/USSenatorAndUSRepresentative.htm>  
<https://nmplates.com/StateOfficersAndOtherStatePlates.htm#SS>

# Guest, Tourist and Visitor Plates

Early in the twentieth century New Mexico's legislators seem to have been torn between encouraging tourism and collecting every possible dime in automobile licensing fees. Considerable effort was expended advertising the Sunshine State across the nation to those who might be lured to enjoy the mild weather and to see the many cultural and natural attractions. But tourists who stayed in the state longer than sixty days, thereby leaving more money at local businesses, were rewarded by being slapped with the requirement to buy a license plate just like any permanent resident would.

## **Tourists**

The 1912 law (Sec. 1) merely said "Tourists passing through the state shall not be required to pay the license prescribed by this act unless they shall remain within the state for more than sixty days." There was no mention of whether this applied to just those who were truly vacationers, or whether people conducting business in the state might be included. In any case, there was no separate license plate; if you stayed longer than 60 days, you bought a regular license plate just like everybody else.

## **Non-Residents**

The rules were tightened in the 1913 law (Sec. 7): "The provisions of this Act, relative to registration and the display of registration numbers, shall not apply to a motor vehicle owned by a non-resident of this State, provided such vehicle bears the number and initials of some other State and does not remain in this State more than sixty days." There was no mention of tourists (just "non-residents" in general), or their purpose of being in the state. Thus, business persons and tourists alike counted as tourists, as long as the car was already licensed in another state.

In the circumstance where you did have to buy a plate, it was not a special plate, but one like every other New Mexico motorist had. The subsequent 1915 law carried the identical language. (As will be seen in the chapter on "Salesman" plates, business people were ultimately split off into a separate category, and would be issued special license plates.)

## Tourist Tags

There still must have been people slipping through the cracks, and the legislature in 1919 decided that a tourist staying even 30 days was wearing out his welcome. The 1919 law, Sec. 13, said: "Upon entering this state a tourist motor vehicle owner or operator shall obtain within thirty days after crossing the state line, from any garage authorized by the Secretary to issue such license, a tourist's license tag, provided said vehicle has been registered and carried such authorized registration license plate or certificate from another state." A three dollar fee was charged for the license, which was good until the end of the current license year.

For the first time, actual Tourist license tags were issued, and not by Santa Fe, but by authorized garages. The 1919 law became effective January 1, 1920, and Tourist tags survive from this period. They are nothing more than small aluminum seals, or tabs, almost identical in size and shape to the 1921 revalidation seals used on New Mexico's porcelain license plates. They bear the words "New Mexico Tourist," the year, and a serial number. These small tags are rare, and to date have been found for only one year, 1921.

Interestingly, though, all of the known 1921 tags are actually over-stamped on 1920 tags. The reason for this can be deduced from the Secretary of State's biennial report.

Application blanks were printed and the necessary tags secured during 1919, in preparation for the law going into effect on January 1, 1920. But during all of 1920, only 25 visitor tags were sold. [*Report of the Secretary of State Manuel Martinez ... Seventh and Eighth Fiscal Years, 1919-1920*, p.17. (FY 1919 and FY 1920)] Though the number of tags originally acquired by the agency was not stated, known serial numbers run as high as 1805, from which we can infer that perhaps 2,000 of them had been bought. Rather than throw good money after bad by purchasing new tags for 1921, it appears obvious that the 1,975 or so tags left over from 1920 were simply over-stamped with the new date.

### Elimination of the Tourist Tags

The fact that no later years of Tourist tags are known indicates that by 1922 a decision had been made to dispense with the metal tags and rely only on a license printed on paper or cardstock to perform the dual function of both license and "tag." Indeed, Secretary of State Manuel Martinez, in the aforementioned biennial report, recommended not only that the Tourist tags be dispensed with, but that tourists not be required to buy a license at all, at least for the first several months they remained in the state.



Perhaps acting on that recommendation, the legislature passed a new motor vehicle law in 1923 which relaxed New Mexico's grip on tourists. Gone was the special tag, and visitors "operating a passenger automobile" were given three months to tour the state without a New Mexico license plate. After that, a standard resident license plate had to be obtained.

Not exempted, though, were "the non-resident ... owner[s] of every passenger automobile, motor truck, or trailer carrying passengers, freight, express or articles for hire, or operated as a commercial truck or commercial car within this State or between points without and points within this State, [who] shall be required to apply for registration and pay the registration fees, and to secure and constantly display the plates specified in this Act for vehicles and trailers of like class and capacity." Thus, the loosening of the restrictions on tourists was counterbalanced by tightening the rules on commercial operators.

### **"Foreign Vehicles"**

Six years later the legislature introduced a new term, "foreign vehicle," defined as "Every motor vehicle, trailer, or semi-trailer which shall be brought into this state otherwise than in the ordinary course of business by or through a manufacturer or dealer, and which has not been registered in this state." Which was a long-winded way of saying, a vehicle not yet registered in New Mexico, and brought into the state by anyone other than a dealer. [*Laws of 1929*, Chapter 119, § 1]

### **Free Pass for Six Months**

The 1929 law further stated that a non-resident could bring a "foreign vehicle" into the state for as long as six months before he had to buy a regular New Mexico license plate. Exempted from this new and more generous free pass were vehicles for hire and vehicles used in the conduct of any business. Those had to obtain a license immediately upon arrival in the state. [*Laws of 1929*, Chapter 119, § 21]

## **Guest Plates**

The six month grace period remained the status quo through the introduction of "Guest" license plates in 1932. These plates are well known to collectors today because of their ready availability in pristine, unissued condition. They are identical to the 1932 "Sunshine State" passenger plates except that sandwiched between the stacked "NEW MEX 32" and the serial number in the center are the stacked letters "GST" (for "Guest," of course).

Surprisingly, New Mexico's Guest plates were not mandated by the legislature, nor was there any requirement to actually use them. Accordingly, there was no enforcement, nor any penalty for failure to use them.

It turns out that the State Comptroller, J.M. Lujan, dreamed up the Guest plates on his own. Only one dollar was charged for the plates, which were issued as singles, in contrast to pairs of plates for resident vehicles. Mr. Lujan ordered 2,500 of the plates, saying that "travelers will seek them to avoid any annoyance of being stopped by officers to ascertain whether they are bonafide tourists. Likewise ..., tourists will want them for souvenirs of their trips through New Mexico." [Clovis Evening News-Journal, July 23, 1931, p.5, c.5]

Once they arrived from the manufacturer, Guest plates were placed on sale continuously in all county seats, and the first one was sold by Mr. Lujan on Thursday, December 17, 1931, to Mrs. Arras Williams of Denver. [Albuquerque Journal, December 18, 1931, p.3, c.4] The news report doesn't state whether the plate she got was #1, but considering that she bought it from the Comptroller himself in Santa Fe, there's a good chance it was. After the six month grace period was over, tourists would be obliged to purchase regular New Mexico resident license plates.

The Comptroller's plan was well-intentioned, but considering how many unused plates of this type are found in the hands of collectors eighty years later, sales must have been a flop. In fact, after being on sale for four months, only 84 Guest plates had been sold [Santa Fe New Mexican, April 26, 1932, p.1, c.3], and in all of 1932 only 316 of them found buyers. [Biennial Report of the Comptroller's Department ... for the Nineteenth and Twentieth Fiscal Years, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 34. (FY 1931 and FY 1932)] (In an unrelated sequence of events, Comptroller Lujan was to be replaced in mid-1932 by Juan Vigil. See the chapter on "Manufacturers" for more on that story.)

Unwilling to suffer a total loss on the investment, however, another use was found for the plates.

In February 1932 it was announced that out-of-state salesmen operating in New Mexico would have to buy Guest license plates. They were sold at the same \$1 price that tourists paid, but would be good for only thirty days. After the month was up, the salesman could buy another one (for another dollar), and could do this a maximum of four times. After that he had to buy a standard resident license plate. [Las Vegas Daily Optic, February 24, 1932, p.5, c.3]

Thus, New Mexico's first Guest plates also became New Mexico's first "Salesman" plates. Guest plates were destined to die out by year's end, but Salesman plates would rise again on their own a few years later.

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://nmplates.com/Guest-Tourist-Visitor.htm>

# Highway Department

Once New Mexico got fully into the business of licensing motor vehicles, it made no exceptions. All vehicles, whether privately owned, or the property of some governmental unit, were required to be licensed. State, county, and municipally owned vehicles, including Highway Department vehicles, received the same “civilian” plates as every other vehicle, but they got them free.

Keep in mind that prior to 1923 all plates were “passenger” plates. That is, no distinction was made between passenger cars and any other types (except motorcycles and dealers), so trucks and other vehicles are mixed in with cars in the registration listings. The only way to tell if a given plate belonged to a car or a two-ton flatbed truck, for example, is to look up the plate number in the registration records. (That only works for the few years for which the records have survived, of course.)

## 1923

The New Mexico State Highway Department was the first state agency to receive its own unique plates, the oldest of which are from the porcelain era.

The Renewals section of the *1923 Motor Vehicle Register*, dated July 1, 1923, shows several blocks of “civilian” license plates which had been issued to the Highway Department during 1920-1922, and then renewed by the Department for 1923. Most of these are for trucks, with most of those trucks being Nash Quads. Not all numbers within the blocks are renewed, some vehicles apparently having been disposed of between 1920 and the beginning of 1923.

Moreover, the section for 1923 *new* issues shows Highway Department vehicles being added to the registrations, and receiving new “civilian” porcelain license plates right up through June (the last month covered by this book).

There is no “Highway Department” section in the *1923 Motor Vehicle Register*, and from these facts we can conclude that the purpose-made New Mexico Highway Department porcelain license plates are all 1923 issues, and more specifically, they were all issued after July 1, 1923.

The records show that when the porcelains first came out in 1920, Highway Department vehicles were issued the majority of the most desirable plate numbers, including blocks of plates from #3 to #149, #3154 to #3228, and many others later in the series. So if you ever hoped to own, say, New Mexico porcelain

plate #9, you can kiss that dream goodbye, as it spent its short life kicking around on the tail end of a Peerless truck out on road construction duty. Peerless truck, serial number 27286, no less.

For a much more detailed discussion of Highway Department porcelain plates, please see the chapter on “Porcelains.”

## 1924

The return to embossed steel (often called “tin”) plates in 1924 also ushered in an era of plates being issued in front-and-back pairs (except for trailers and motorcycles). The format of the new plates was distinctly different from any of New Mexico’s earlier plates, and the year saw the greatest number of non-passenger types ever issued so far.

No 1924 Highway Department plates are known to survive with original paint, but the odds are that they were black on orange since both passenger cars and commercial trucks carried those colors, and since the only type publicly announced as being different were the red-on-grey commercial car (i.e., taxi) plates. [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, November 1923, p. 8] The format was a stacked N over M, left; stacked 4-digit date right; “HWY. DEPT.” bottom, and the serial number center.

## 1925

For 1925 the format was revised somewhat with a stacked N over M over the horizontal 2-digit date, and “HWY. DEPT.” bottom, with the plate number in the middle. The left side, where the word “FRONT” or “BACK” appears on passenger, commercial and other types of plates, is blank. Perhaps it was felt that since these were state-owned vehicles which received their plates free, there would be no attempts to avoid licensing them.

One of the most distinctive features of the 1925 plate is the black-on-white color scheme, which is the reverse of all other known types for this year. This reversal does, to some extent, call into question suppositions that we might make about the colors of earlier and later HD plates.

## 1926

The long, narrow plate adopted for passenger cars in 1926 was used for Highway Department tags as well, but with an altered layout. On the left side is “NM” and “26,” both horizontal but stacked over each other. On the right side are the abbreviations “HWAY” and “DEPT,” side by side, with each one stacked

vertically. Colors are unknown, and taking into consideration the fact that commercial truck plate colors for this year are different from passenger plates, and the fact that 1925 Highway Department plates were reversed from passenger colors, it would be risky to venture a guess as to the actual colors.

## **1927**

The Zia symbol was introduced on all New Mexico plates in 1927, with the 2-digit year enclosed inside of the symbol's center, and Highway Department plates for this year are identical to passenger plates in both color and format, but with the addition of the two side-by-side stacked words "HWAY" and "DEPT" carried over from the previous year.

## **1928**

An identical layout was used in 1928, with only the year changed. The colors are unknown, but there is reason to believe that they were the same as passenger car colors, since all Highway Department plates with known colors, from 1927 onward, are the same as passenger colors. This guess is ventured cautiously, with the knowledge that 1928 commercial truck plates are different, i.e., blue on yellow.

## **1929-1930**

There has been a long-standing mystery with regard to some years, including both 1929 and 1930. Highway Department vehicles had been steadily increasing in number to the point where there were probably at least 300 of them by 1929. Nonetheless, no Highway Department license plates are known to exist for either 1929 or 1930.

The mystery was recently solved with the discovery of detailed license plate statistics in the Comptroller's biennial reports. The Comptroller showed no Highway Department plates purchased or issued in 1930, but 1,000 Official plates purchased, of which 782 were issued that year. Then in 1931, there were 493 Highway Department plates issued, while Officials dropped to 381. [*Biennial Report of the Comptroller's Department ... for the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Fiscal Years, R.F. Asplund, State Comptroller, p. 17 (FY 1929 and FY 1930), and Biennial Report of the Comptroller's Department ... for the Nineteenth and Twentieth Fiscal Years, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 34 (FY 1931 and FY 1932)*]

We can take this as prima facie evidence that Official license plates were used by the Highway Department in 1930. That this is so is further substantiated by existing period photographs of Highway Department vehicles bearing 1930 Official plates. [See, for example, *New Mexico Highway Journal*, December 1930, p. 11.]

Given that Official plates numbered as high as 790 are known to exist for 1929 (dropping to just 381 issued in 1931, as noted above), we can draw the same conclusion that Highway Department vehicles used Official plates in 1929 as well. (The preceding figures refer to *pairs* of plates, not singles, of course.)

This solves the 1929-1930 enigma, but even as the number of Highway Department vehicles increased further, there would be other later years here and there for which these plates are not known to exist.

### **1931**

After a dearth of plates the previous two years, Highway Department plates have survived in significant numbers from 1931. These include unissued plates, indicating an overestimation of need when the planning was being done the previous year at which time 500 pairs of plates were ordered for the Department. [Clovis Evening News-Journal, August 4, 1930, p.5, c.4] These plates are in passenger colors with “NEW MEXICO” top, “HIGHWAY DEPT.” bottom, and the serial number middle. All of these plates are double Zias, as the highest number was only 500.

### **1932**

The company which manufactured New Mexico’s license plates for 1932 was different that one year, as compared to the years immediately before and after, and this probably explains why the plates for this year were different in size and format from all other years. (See the chapter on “Manufacturers” for more details.) But within this year, Highway Department plates were identical to those for passenger cars, with two differences: (1) In place of the “Sunshine State” slogan at the bottom, the single word “HIGHWAY” appeared in block letters noticeably taller than those in the slogan. (2) Because of the height of the word “HIGHWAY,” the numerals of the serial number were not as tall as those on passenger and some other types of plates for this year.

### **1933**

These plates followed the basic design of the 1933 passenger plates in both layout and color, but with the addition of the word “HIGHWAY” in quite large block letters at the top. This left little space for the plate number, which was embossed in rather short, squat numerals. All in all, though, it was quite an attractive plate.

## 1934

Late in 1933 the New Mexico State Penitentiary acquired the necessary manufacturing equipment and began stamping out all types of plates for 1934. For Highway Department plates, the iconic H-superimposed-on-D monogram was introduced, the use of which would continue into the 1960s.

For the next two decades (excepting a few years for which HD plates are not known) Highway Department plates would match passenger plates in color and layout, the only difference being the large, bold HD monogram placed at the right side, following the serial number.

## 1935

For decades during modern times Highway Department plates were not known to exist, even though the registration records show that 500 pairs were manufactured and turned over to the department. Official plates are not known for this year either, but the records show 488 pairs having been issued. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1935*] As yet, no one has found any information to explain the absence of these two types for 1935, though one theory is that for this one year alone the state required that the users of Highway Department and Official plates return them to the state for destruction at year's end. This state of affairs remained unchanged until late in 2014 when two unissued pairs of 1935 HD tags surfaced on the eastern side of the state. One of these plates is illustrated at the end of this chapter, and on our companion website at [NMplates.com/HighwayDepartment.htm](http://NMplates.com/HighwayDepartment.htm).

## 1936-1946

From this point through at least 1946, HD plates followed the pattern established in 1934, other than that there were no metal plates in 1943. Whether or not there were unique Highway Department windshield stickers that year is unknown, but in view of the fact that these were state-owned vehicles that received their plates free anyway, the powers-that-be may have simply forgone the stickers and kept the 1942 plates on the vehicles.

In September of 1936 Motor Vehicle Commissioner Diego Salazar, apparently responding to criticism of the number of vehicles owned by the state, said that 700 sets of plates had been made for the Highway Department for the current year. The 700, he said, included 200 trailer plates and 500 for cars and trucks. He had turned over the whole consignment of 700 sets to the Highway Department, charging that department for the entire order, and he had no way of knowing how many of these the department had actually issued. He explained that he let the Highway Department take care of its own distribution instead of issuing the plates directly out of his office, and therefore didn't know how many were actually in use.

Salazar said he had the trailer plates made for the Highway Department because the State Police were complaining that unlicensed trailers were being used by that department. It turns out that these were undated but otherwise distinctive plates carrying both the designation “TRAILER” and the HD monogram. The year is unequivocally told by the tag’s colors and the diameter of the central circle of the Zia. Only one of these highly unique tags is known to survive (in the hands of a Highway Department employee, no less), and is illustrated at the end of this chapter and on our companion website at: [NMplates.com/HighwayDepartment.htm](http://NMplates.com/HighwayDepartment.htm).

Meanwhile, State Highway Engineer Grover Conroy issued a clarification, saying that his department had only 341 cars and trucks. [All details above from *Santa Fe New Mexican*, September 23, 1936, p.1, c.2 and p.8, c.5]

The 1933 Trailer registration records show 154 standard trailer license plates issued to the Highway Department, but with none showing the type or size of trailer, while the 1934 records show none at all. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1933* and *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1934*] This may be an indication of the Highway Department dispensing with the licensing of trailers beginning in 1934, thereby raising the hackles of the State Police.

Registration records for 1936 show that 500 pairs of plates were issued to Highway Department motor vehicles that year, but the vehicles are not listed individually. The entry simply says “1 to 500 State Highway Department, Santa Fe.” [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1936*] (The discrepancy of the 500 vs. the 700 mentioned above was probably because the 1936 *Directory* was published about mid-year, and the 200 trailer plates weren’t made until later, not long before the September 23 newspaper article appeared.)

The same method of recording the registrations was used for the 568 pairs of plates issued in 1937, [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1937*] and the 569 pairs issued in 1938. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1938*]

Sometime during the production of the 1941 plates the serial number dies were shortened from 3½" to 3", such that two styles of HD plates exist for that year. This was almost certainly related to the identical reduction in die height brought about by the use of the “CORONADO CUARTO CENTENNIAL” slogan on the 1940 passenger plates, and the continuation of that smaller size with the introduction of the “THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT” slogan on the 1941 passenger plates.

Punches and dies wear out and have to be replaced periodically throughout the production year and it may be that the prison plate shop was continuing to make use of remaining good dies in the larger size for Highway Department plates (which did not carry either slogan at the time) until those dies wore out too.



(While we generally refer to these pieces of license plate tooling generically as “dies,” technically there are two halves to each set. The male half is called a “punch” and the female half is called a “die.”)

Interestingly, most, if not all, of the 1942 HD plates were made with the larger dies, but by 1944 a permanent switch had been made to the shorter dies. And in 1951, since there was room for it, the “THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT” slogan was added to Highway Department plates for the first time as well.

### **1947-1948**

No Highway Department plates are known from the years 1947-1948, and because Official plates from these years are relatively plentiful, we might again surmise that Official plates were used on HD vehicles during this period.

### **1949-1953**

By 1949 Highway Department plates had reappeared in the same format as was initiated in 1934—using passenger colors and layout, with the addition of the HD monogram following the serial number.

The first signs of permanent change came in 1953 when a reflective background (believed to have consisted of a paint infused with reflective glass beads) was introduced, and the colors were reversed from those of passenger cars. The monogram was also moved to the left side of the plate, separated from the plate number by the Zia symbol.

### **1954-1968**

The classic Highway Department plate came to an end in 1954, when even the date was dropped. The HD monogram was still there, but now these undated reflective plates were changed to a generic government blue on white, which were kept in use for more than one year. Moreover, it is thought that undated reflective blue-on-white Official tags, bearing the letters “OF” in place of the monogram, may have been used by the Department for several years in both the 1950s and 1960s.

The last known use of the HD monogram was on a series of undated plates, each of a different color. The first of these was a blue-on-reflective-white plate which exactly matches the generic government blue on white mentioned above, and to a lesser extent also resembles the 1966 plates used on civilian trucks, motorcycles and certain other non-passenger vehicles. Its 6" x 12" size confirms that it is no earlier than 1956, and, as we shall see, other evidence argues that it can be no later than 1966.

The date of 1966 itself can also be eliminated because the type of reflective coating (a glass-bead paint) applied to this plate is identical to that used on the plates of other state-owned vehicles during the early 1950s. The more modern reflective material introduced on some civilian plates in 1961, and especially that on truck, motorcycle and other plates of 1964-1966 (and later) is more of a plasticized sheeting. The conclusion, then, is that this particular Highway Department variety might have been placed in service in 1956, and may have been manufactured and issued over the course of several years, into the early 1960s.

The second of the series is dark blue on reflective tan, essentially identical to the colors of the 1967 motorcycle, trailer and some other non-passenger plates of the same year. Since these colors were used for only one year, and in the absence of any information to the contrary, we might therefore infer that the Highway Department plates of this color are 1967 issues also.

On the other hand, the die style of the HD monogram on the blue-on-reflective-tan plate matches that of earlier (1951-1955) Highway Department plates, and the die style of the monogram on the blue-on-reflective-white tag matches that of the (apparently) later HD plates. As a result, we really don't know whether to date these by color or by die style. The best generalization we can make is that they fall between 1956 and some time in mid-1960s.

A third HD-monogrammed plate has black numerals and letters on a reflective salmon (or burnt orange) background. These colors are identical to those of the 1968 trailer, motorcycle and various other 1968 non-passenger plates, leaving little doubt but that this HD plate is a '68 as well.

The black-on-salmon plate also ushered in the use of a two-digit numerical prefix which represents the Highway Department maintenance district to which the vehicle is assigned. Since 1983 there have been six of these geographical districts in the state, numbered at present from 01 to 06, though for a number of years prior there had been only five. *[Letter, Lawrence S. Grebner, N.M. Department of Transportation, to Bill Johnston, February 10, 2012.]*

The last plate of this series is an enigma in that its colors—dark blue on a painted (not reflective) greenish white—match no other known plates of the late 1960s. Oddly, it very closely matches the colors of 1963 motorcycle plates, but is almost certainly not from that year as it uses the district number prefix which, as best can be told, was introduced in 1968. That would seem to imply that it could be a 1969 plate, but it does not carry the “USA” that was added to New Mexico plates that year. One theory is that it was a transition plate between the '67 and '68 plates, or between '68 and '69, but until definitive documentation is unearthed it will remain one of those enduring New Mexico mysteries.

In all likelihood some or all of the preceding four color variations were in use for more than one calendar year, and only newly-purchased vehicles in a given year received the color associated with that year. If that is indeed the case, it would account for the paucity in numbers of all four of the variants described above.

## **1969 and later**

Following the 1968 issues, the HD monogram plate was replaced by an altogether new format which debuted on a maroon-on-light-blue reflective plate bearing the two-digit district prefix, followed by a monogram of the letters “H” and “C”, followed by the plate serial number. The “HC” stood for Highway Commission, which was somewhat of a misnomer at this point in history, as the “Highway Commission” was at that time (and still is) a small panel of political appointees who make decisions and recommendations, and who have nothing to do directly with the vehicles bearing the license plates. (The commissioners would get their own special plates beginning in the 1970s, though.) In any case, the HC monogram lasted only about a year or less, and plates of this style are accordingly scarce.

Later in 1969, or shortly thereafter, the HC monogram was replaced by the two letters “HD”—not as a monogram, but as individual letters. Otherwise the color and format remained the same as the previous year, i.e., maroon on blue, and with the district prefix followed by the letters HD, followed by the plate serial number. Being multi-year license plates, they were not regularly replaced, such that these plates are not often seen. This was also the point at which the letters “USA” were added after the state name on New Mexico’s plates, though within a decade or so the country abbreviation was dropped from Highway Department plates, while remaining on passenger and other tags.

## **1987**

Originally created by the Territorial Legislature in 1903 as the New Mexico Territorial Highway Commission, the first State Legislature in 1912 renamed and recreated the organization as the new Mexico State Highway Commission. The Legislature again changed the name in 1921 to the New Mexico State Highway Department. It was during the tenure of this name that almost all of the classic Highway Department license plates were issued.

In 1987, however, the Legislature made yet another change, this time to the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department, to reflect increased responsibilities under its domain. Along with the name change came a change in the letters on its license plates, from “HD” to “HT”. The colors remained maroon on reflective light blue, and the format was otherwise unchanged.

## **2003**

For similar reasons, the name was changed again, to the New Mexico Department of Transportation, abbreviated NMDOT, following a naming trend that was sweeping across similar departments in many other states. Not long

before or after this latest change came the abandonment of license plates which distinctively identified vehicles as belonging to the Department. Since that time they have been assigned the same generic New Mexico State Government plates that all other state, county, and municipal vehicles use. These were initially the G-prefix plates, later superseded by the SG-suffix plates.

## Highway Department Names

In summary, the evolution of names of the New Mexico State Highway Department was as follows:

1903	New Mexico Territorial Highway Commission
1912	New Mexico State Highway Commission
1921	New Mexico State Highway Department
1987	New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department
2003	New Mexico Department of Transportation

## Photographs for this Chapter

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# Motor Truck

Motor Truck license plates were issued only to trucks with solid tires, including those of solid rubber, steel, and other materials. But there is more to the story than just that.

The *1919 Laws of New Mexico* were the turning point where commercial vehicles first began to be separated from automobiles as a separate class, and with different (i.e., higher) registration fees. In Chapter 150, Section 1, of those laws a new definition was provided:

“ ‘**Motor Trucks**’ as used in this act shall include all motor vehicles using solid rubber or metal tires on two or more wheels. Motor trucks equipped with pneumatic tires shall be considered, for licensing purposes, the same as automobiles.”

This was simple enough; no matter what the vehicle looked like, if it had pneumatic tires it was considered an automobile; if it had solid tires, it was a Motor Truck. Section 4 of the 1919 Law set forth a table of licensing fees that was based on the horsepower of the vehicle. For any given horsepower, the fees for a Motor Truck were calculated at 25% more than for a car.

The reason for this was that solid tires tore up roads to a far greater extent than pneumatic tires. The higher fees helped to pay for the more frequent road repairs from damage caused by the solid tires.

Most solid-tired vehicles at this time were trucks with very heavy carrying capacities. In the early days there simply were no pneumatic tires capable of supporting such weights, and solid tires were the only alternative. But by 1919 pneumatic tires had improved to the point that they could be used on almost all trucks. So a secondary reason for the higher fees was to encourage owners to either refit with pneumatic tires, or scrap the solid-tired trucks entirely.

The 1919 law became effective on January 1, 1920, but even with the changes brought about by the law, there was no difference in license plates. Motor Trucks received the same porcelain license plates as cars.

For the purposes of this chapter, our discussion has to do with those New Mexico license plates embossed with the words “MOTOR TRUCK.” But even though this type of vehicle had been defined in 1919, it would take another set of laws, those passed in early 1923, to bring about distinctive license plates—not only for Motor Trucks but for other types of commercial vehicles as well.

The 1923 motor vehicle law became effective on July 1, 1923, and contained this critical clause: “Upon receipt of ... application and fee the registrar shall issue and deliver to [the] owner a registration certificate for such vehicle and without extra charge ... shall issue and deliver to such owner plates bearing the name of the State of New Mexico or abbreviation thereof, the number assigned to such vehicle and in case of a motor truck, commercial truck, commercial car mentioned in Section 3 hereof and in case of a trailer, a plate showing the weight and carrying capacity thereof.”

This was the genesis of a whole family of distinctive plates—Commercial Car, Commercial Truck, Motor Truck, and so forth—which would bear small metal seals (“tabs”) showing the weight and carrying capacity of the vehicle. These additional new commercial categories also came with higher registration fees, just as the Motor Truck fees had been hiked in 1920.

Vehicles which were already registered and equipped with regular porcelain plates had to be re-registered by July 1, 1923, and the additional commercial fees paid, prorated for the remaining six months of the year. [1923 Laws, Chapter 96, Sec. 3] Their existing porcelain plates were replaced with embossed steel (“tin”) plates dated 1923. New registrants on and after July 1 received the tin plates as initial issues.

Embossed 1923 tin plates for both Commercial Car and Commercial Truck are fairly common and do not carry seals, as the new law stipulated that the weight and capacity would be shown beginning with the 1924 issues. This also applied to Motor Truck tags.

Motor Truck plates exist for 1924 through 1929, inclusive (less 1925, which probably exists but just hasn’t yet been found). Based on the reading of the 1919 and 1923 laws, we’re of the opinion that embossed steel Motor Truck plates were made in 1923, and also simply haven’t yet been found. Colors are not known for any years, as no original paint examples exist for any years. An educated guess says that they are probably the same colors as Commercial Truck plates in any given year, which in turn are different from passenger colors in at least some years.

The only year for which registration data have been analyzed is 1928, a year in which fewer than 200 Motor Truck plates were issued. These plates are not often seen, and as the plate numbering started at #1 each year, all extant plates of this type have very low numbers. A major proportion of Motor Truck plates that year went to vehicles owned by mining, petroleum exploration, and utility companies. Many of these were very heavy, early Graham, Liberty, and Mack trucks, though other makes such as White, International, Packard, Diamond T and Reo were represented as well. The City of Santa Fe took two of the plates for its 1916 and 1925 American La France fire trucks. [Motor Vehicle Register 1928]

As simple as it started out sounding, the definition of “Motor Truck” evolved over a period of time to mean something much broader. The 1923 Laws, Section 1, changed the definition to this:

**“Motor Truck.** Any motor vehicle designed and used principally for carrying things other than passengers.”

In other words, anything that we would think of today as a “truck” was now called a “Motor Truck,” regardless of what kind of tires it used. Nonetheless, the 1923 law retained the 25% surcharge for all vehicles with solid tires, this time including trailers in the bargain, too.

Notwithstanding the new wider meaning of the term “Motor Truck,” every evidence is that those license plates specifically embossed with the words “MOTOR TRUCK” were issued only to trucks with solid rubber or solid metal tires, from their beginning in 1923 and continuing through 1929.

The motor vehicle law passed in 1929 imposed further pain on these hapless vehicles. The 25% penalty for having solid rubber tires was kept for the time being, but a truck unlucky enough to have solid tires of any other material (steel, for instance) was slapped with a 100% penalty. [*Laws of 1929*, Chapter 119, § 28]

Motor Truck registrations were never numerous in any year. The few years for which records are available show the following:

- 1924** At mid-year there were 103 Motor Trucks registered. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1924*]
- 1926** Probably a mid-year publication, the *Motor Vehicle Register 1926* showed 99 Motor Trucks registered.
- 1927** Again probably a mid-year figure, 134 Motor Truck registrations are recorded. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1927*]
- 1928** Showing a total of 201 Motor Trucks, the date of publication of the *Motor Vehicle Register 1928* is not given in that book, but it is likely a mid-year release.

Aside from the fact that solid-tired vehicles tended to beat both cargo and driver senseless, they were an anachronism which had long since outlived their practical usefulness. If owners of these vehicles wouldn’t retire them voluntarily, the state intended to tax them into submission. In any case, no examples of Motor Truck plates after 1929 have been found, nor do any of the known registration records make reference to them.

**Registration Data for Selected Motor Truck Plates Illustrated in  
this Chapter  
and on our companion website at  
NMplates.com/MotorTruck.htm**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Plate #</u></b>	<b><u>Registered To</u></b>
1924	50	C.H. Bryson, Magdalena, N.M., 1920 Maxwell truck
1926	22	First National Bank, Farmington, N.M., 1922 White truck
1927	88	Williams Petroleum Corp., Artesia, N.M., 1925 Mack truck
1928	55	Carnahan Mines Co, Carnahan, N.M., 1927 Graham truck

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

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# Motorcycle

On the first day of December, 1914, New Mexico's State Engineer, Jim French, delivered his department's inaugural report to Governor McDonald. Using a bit of editorial diplomacy, he informed the Governor that "the road situation throughout the state ... was deplorable." *[First Report of the State Engineer of New Mexico, December 1, 1914]* In reality, matters were far worse, for beyond the developed areas of major towns the state's roads ranged from abysmal to nonexistent.

Vast distances, sparse population, lack of funding and the absence of roads were conspiring to hamstring New Mexico's growth and economic future. But that was not to say that the state was entirely absent from America's burgeoning motor car revolution, as New Mexico saw 904 automobiles registered as early as 1912, a number which more than tripled by 1914 to 3,090. Trouble was, they had nowhere to go. The primitive tracks that connected towns were largely unsuited for cars, as even brief rain showers regularly washed out roads, making them impassable to the sputtering tin lizzies of the day.

## **Motorcycles make it through**

For many New Mexicans, motorcycles proved to be the solution. They could wend their way between and through ruts, rocks, gullies, and washouts with little difficulty. A motorcyclist who got stuck in the mud didn't have to look for a farmer with a team of horses to pull him out. Not least of all, a motorcycle was a *lot* cheaper than a car.

In truth, though, New Mexico's road situation was not greatly different from that in many other parts of the country. In light of this, early motorcycle entrepreneurs envisioned a nationwide demand so great that during the years up to 1929 nearly three hundred brands came to be manufactured in America.

Of those 300 American brands, at least 34 makes were registered in New Mexico between 1913 and 1929 (see table below, derived from New Mexico's early registration records). Harley and Indian dominated, with their combined numbers making up some 79 percent of all the motorcycles in the state.

Meanwhile, Henry Ford's mass production of the Model T steadily drove down the price of an automobile until, by the 1920s, a basic car could be bought for less than a motorcycle. Who would want to ride exposed to the elements on a motorcycle when for the same money you could travel in the relative comfort of a car on ever-improving roads? In terms of production, motorcycling reached its zenith right around the time New Mexico became a state and starting licensing motor vehicles. There would not be another significant peak until after World War II.

**Motorcycle Makes Represented  
in New Mexico 1913-1929**

<b>Make &amp; Years Produced</b>	<b>%</b>
Ace (1920-1927)	0.4
American (1911-1914)	0.3
Armac (1902-1913)	0.1
Arrow (1909-1916)	0.2
Cleveland (1915-1929)	0.8
Curtiss (1901-1913)	0.1
DeLuxe (1912-1915)	0.1
Eagle (1909-1915)	0.1
Emblem (1907-1925)	0.2
Excelsior (1908-1931)	5.4
Flanders (1911-1914)	0.6
Flying Merkel 1910-1915	1.1
Greyhound (1907-1914)	0.1
Harley-Davidson (1903-present)	41.6
Hawthorne (1911-1912)	0.1
Henderson (1912-1931)	1.6
Hudson (1910-1911)	0.1
Indian (1901-1953)	37.5
Liberty (1918)	0.1
Marsh & Metz (1900-1913)	0.4
Miami (1905-1916)	0.1
Minneapolis (1908-1914)	0.2
Neracar (1920-1927)	0.2
New Era (1909-1913)	0.5
Peerless (1912-1916)	0.1
Pierce (1909-1913)	0.6
Pope (1911-1918)	1.8
Reading Standard (1903-1922)	0.8
Sears (1912-1916)	0.4
Smith (1914-1924)	0.3
Thor (1912-1917)	0.9
Wagner (1901-1914)	0.1
Yale (1902-1915)	3.3

For reasons unknown, the State of New Mexico—either accidentally or intentionally—failed to include motorcycles in its 1912 licensing law. This is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Vegas and Raton all incorporated motorcycles into their pre-state municipal licensing

ordinances. The omission lasted less than a year, though, until the 1913 law broadened the statute from an “Automobile Licensing Law” to a “Motor Vehicle Licensing Law.”

## 1913-1919

The 1913 law became effective March 15, 1913, and the first motorcycle was registered on June 11. The machine was a one-cylinder Indian belonging to Antonio Lucero, Jr. of Santa Fe, and the license cost him two dollars. [*Automobile License Record 1912–1914*] (More details on Lucero are given at the end of this chapter.)

Implementation of the new law meant that motorcycles were now being licensed, but that was not to say that the state managed to get every motorcycle signed up. The authorities had already found it impossible to get all of the automobile owners to register, and there is evidence to indicate that motorcycle owners were even more prone to evade the law.

By the end of 1913 just 177 motorcycles were on the books, each one having received a green-on-white, vertically-oriented 3¾" x 7¼" license plate bearing the plate number, the letters “NM” and the four-digit 1913 date. The fact that the only two known surviving examples of these plates are numbered higher than 177 (in fact, above #250) indicates that the folks in the Secretary’s office didn’t get near the degree of cooperation that they expected when they ordered the plates—a state of affairs that would continue well into the 1930s.

The 1913 motorcycle plates were the same color as car plates for that year, and, with the exception of 1944 when they were the reverse, they would continue to match car plates in color all the way through 1959.

Once the 1913 plates had been issued, the die was cast for motorcycle plates to retain the same vertical format for the next decade. There were some differences in size and layout, however. On the 1913 plate the plate number was stacked vertically on the left side, while the NM 1913 was stacked vertically on the right side. For 1914 through 1919, at 3" x 9", the plates were narrower but taller, and on these the plate number was stacked vertically down the middle, and below that was a horizontal “N-M” stacked over a horizontal two-digit year.

The vertical orientation was used by a number of states over the years because it lined up nicely with the rear fender of the motorcycle. Aesthetics aside, vertical plates could be a pain for the rider who found his pants leg constantly being snagged by the protruding corners of the tag as he threw his leg over the rear wheel to mount the machine.

## **1920-1923**

A rather elegant solution was found in the 1920 plates, which like the car plates for that year, were porcelain. Rather than being flat, though, they were curved, taking on the character of a section of a motorcycle fender. The idea, of course, was that they would fit snugly like a glove on the rear fender of the cycle.

The problem was that the fenders of every different make of motorcycle had a different width and a different curvature profile, so it is likely that the plates didn't fit really well on any motorcycle, much less all of them. Nonetheless, the design had a distinct advantage in that while the main body of the plate was exposed, all four edges were curved down fairly close to the fender on which the plate was mounted. There were no exposed edges to snag the rider's leg.

Just as the porcelain car plates were used for four years by attachment of small metal revalidation seals (tabs), so too were the porcelain motorcycle plates. For a much more detailed description of these plates, please see the chapter on "Porcelains."

## **1924-1933**

When porcelain plates were dumped in favor of tried-and-true embossed steel plates in 1924, a switch was made to a small 3½" x 5½" horizontal format, which was kept through 1933, excepting 1932, which was a considerably larger 4½" x 8". (The 1932 plates were made by a different manufacturer that one year, which explains the size change. See the chapter on "Manufacturers" for more details.)

Also introduced in 1924 was the practice of inserting the letter "M" as a prefix to the plate number. Some years a hyphen was placed between the M and the serial number, and some years not.

## **1934-1958**

Up through 1933 all New Mexico license plates had been made by out-of-state commercial manufacturers, but 1934 ushered in a 65-year-long run of prison-manufactured plates being stamped out at the State Penitentiary in Santa Fe. With that change also came a redesign that was to last all the way from 1934 through 1958.

During this period the cycle plates were standardized at about 4½" x 8", horizontally oriented, with a relatively small "N.M. 19xx" across the top (where xx was the 2-digit year), and the plate serial number occupying the rest of the

plate. The practice of prefixing the serial number with the letter “M” was continued.

Motorcycle registrations reached 1,000 for the first time during 1947, and to make room for the extra serial number digit the dies were made narrower. The “M” was reduced from 1½" to 1¼" wide and the numerals were reduced in width from 1¼" to 1". And for reasons not known, the “N” and the “M” of the state abbreviation were spaced farther apart at the same time. These changes occurred at or near plate number M-1000, with the result that there are two distinct varieties of 1947 cycle plates. (The narrower dies continued in use through 1958, but the closer spacing of the “N” and the “M” was reinstated very late in 1955, resulting in two varieties for 1955 as well.)

As in the case of plates for all other vehicles, a switch was made from steel to aluminum plates for the years 1947-1949, with the latter year being the same waffle aluminum as car plates. However, an unknown number of 1947 motorcycle plates were made with steel blanks during the early to middle part of the year’s production (#M-309, M-903 and M-908 are known examples), and a very small number of 1951 motorcycle plates were made with leftover waffle aluminum blanks toward the end of that year’s production, with #M-3084 being an unissued example of this type.

## **1959-1966**

The arrival of 1959 saw cycle plates dramatically reduced in size to 3¾" x 6", almost as small as the first horizontal issue that came out in 1924. The smaller format would last into (but not all the way through) 1966.

As mentioned earlier, excepting 1944, New Mexico motorcycle plates were the same colors as passenger car plates from 1913 through 1959, inclusive. 1960 would see a green-on-white tag that matched the colors of no other plate type from that year.

When undated plates were issued for passenger cars in 1961 the same was done for motorcycles, and in the same colors, red on reflective white. It has been reported, but not verified, that the 1961 cycle plates exist in the painted (non-reflective) version, as they do for 1961 base cars tags. On the other hand, whereas the car plates were revalidated with stickers for several subsequent years, motorcycles continued to receive new plates each year, reverting to an embossed date in 1962.

The 1962 plates were green on white, and 1963 blue on bluish white.

The following year saw motorcycles switched to truck plate colors for several years: 1964, black on yellow; 1965, yellow on red; 1966, blue on white.

All motorcycle plates 1964 and later have reflective backgrounds.

## 1966-1971

The smaller plate size that was adopted in 1959 could accommodate only the “M” prefix and four numerical digits, but in the latter part of 1966 New Mexico reached 10,000 motorcycle registrations for the first time in its history. Because there was no room for the fifth digit on the diminutive tag, the state once again enlarged the plates, this time to 4" x 7". Consequently, 1966 motorcycle plates were issued in two sizes—the 3¾" x 6" adopted in 1959, and the new 4" x 7" which has subsequently remained unchanged to this day.

Colors changed again for 1967, becoming dark blue on tan, and switching to black on orange for 1968. The embossed-date 1968 plates served as a base plate for 1969, validated by a 1969 sticker. A secondary version had no embossed date but was otherwise identical. Both varieties were used for 1970, being validated by a 1970 sticker. The colors used during these years—1967's dark blue on tan and the 1968-70 black on orange—were also used on a number of other non-passenger plates, including trailer, commercial bus, and so forth.

1971 saw a return to an embossed date, colored white on light green, which matched truck plates, ham radio, and a variety of other non-passenger plates for that one year.

The 4" x 7" plate size accommodates five digits after the “M,” allowing for up to 99,999 unique motorcycle plates. Even as late as 2012 there were fewer than 70,000 motorcycles registered, so one might think that the numbering system introduced way back in 1924 would be good until at least 2020 or so. The problem, though, was that back in the early 1970s the state abandoned the policy of starting the numbers over at M-1 each year. The turnover in ownership of motorcycles is so great that the numbers ran out in 1981. (Since 1979 New Mexico has been a plate-to-owner state, meaning that the seller keeps the existing license plate, and the buyer has to get a new plate.)

Consequently, the letter “M” was replaced with the letter “N” for a couple of years, 1981-82. In 1983 the letter was dropped entirely, and cycle plates with six numerical digits were introduced. These lasted until about 1992, when the alpha prefix was reinstated, but this time with an “A.”

Around the year 2000, the letter “M” reappeared briefly, replaced in 2001 by the letter “P.” This lasted until 2008, when the letter “R” made its appearance, followed by “S” in 2015. The alphabetical musical chairs will no doubt continue in the future.

## 1972 and Later

From 1972 on, the colors of New Mexico's motorcycle plates matched those of car plates in most, but not all, years. Embossed dates were used in some years, stickers in others, with a permanent switch made in 1979 to undated plates with stickers. The turquoise statehood centennial plate was introduced in 2010, and the highly popular chile plate in 2017. Both of these use different serial number schemes—different from each other, and from the yellow tags.

### X-prefix Motorcycle Plates

Beginning in 1971 and lasting at least through 1991, New Mexico issued special motorcycle plates to machines with a rating of 5 brake horsepower (BHP) or less. (Many mopeds, mini-bikes and trail bikes fell into this category.) The plates were identical to the regular motorcycle plates in every respect except one: Instead of the "M" prefix, they were given an "X" prefix. [*License Plates for 1972*, N.M. Department of Motor Vehicles]

By 1978 the basis for the classification was changed from a power rating to an engine displacement rating, with motorcycles coming in at 100 cc or less receiving the X-prefix plates. Plates of this type were discontinued in the early 1990s.

Effective no later than 2008, mopeds were entirely exempted from New Mexico titling and registration requirements. The policy is set forth in the New Mexico MVD *Vehicle Procedures Manual*, Chapter 18, Section A. For the purposes of this policy a moped is defined as "a two-wheeled or three-wheeled vehicle with an automatic transmission and a motor having a piston displacement of less than 50 cubic centimeters, that is capable of propelling the vehicle at a maximum speed of not more than 30 miles an hour on level ground, at sea level."

The manual explicitly states that the "Motor Vehicle Division is neither required nor authorized to title or register mopeds." However, the driver of a moped on a highway in New Mexico is required to hold a valid driver's license or permit, and mopeds are required to comply with those motor vehicle safety standards deemed necessary and prescribed by the Director of the MVD.

### OH-prefix Plates

A new series of plates was introduced in the 1980s bearing a prefix of OH, designating a license for "Off Highway" use only. Although many of the small trail bikes that had been issued X-prefix plates previously might now fall under the off highway classification, it has been mostly all terrain vehicles (ATVs) which have received the OH plates. This may in fact explain why the X-prefix plates were discontinued just a few years after the introduction of the OH plates. Effective February 9, 2012, the metal OH plates themselves were discontinued and replaced with 3" x 3" vinyl stickers affixed directly to the vehicle body. [New Mexico Administrative Code, NMAC 18.15.3.8, December 30, 2011.] Existing OH plates remained valid until due for renewal, at which time they were also replaced with the new stickers.

## **Snowmobile Plates**

The state of New Mexico classifies snowmobiles as Off Highway vehicles and as such they are issued the same OH plates (now vinyl stickers) as ATVs.

## **On Highway Plates**

In accordance with legislation passed in 2016 a new type of ON Highway registration for off highway vehicles (OHVs) was introduced in partnership with the State Game and Fish Department. This new tag authorizes OHVs that are fully equipped to be street legal, to be operated on public roads, but *only* in local jurisdictions which have passed ordinances explicitly authorizing their use in this manner. For On Highway use, such vehicles must display *both* the yellow OFF HIGHWAY registration decal (sticker), and a green ON/OFF HIGHWAY registration decal (sticker), both of which measure 3" x 3". An optional On Highway motorcycle-size metal plate will be issued upon request, which may be used in lieu of the green sticker.

## **Motorcycle Vanity**

Motorcycle vanity plates were first made available in 1979, some twelve years after they had been introduced for cars. Proportionately, they have always seemed to have been less popular than passenger car vanity plates, perhaps because cycle plates are limited to six characters (just five on the new Chile plates introduced in 2017), whereas car plates can fit seven characters on the yellow yucca tags, eight on turquoise and six on Chile. As a result, motorcycle vanities are hard to come by for almost any year.

## **Motorcycle Amateur Radio**

Over the years a very few motorcycle plates have appeared bearing ham radio call signs (mine among them). As there is no provision in New Mexico law permitting the issuance of ham plates for motorcycles, these plates are obtained by ordering motorcycle vanity plates. In other words, there is no such thing as a motorcycle Amateur Radio plate, but it's perfectly legitimate to order a vanity plate with your call sign on it (provided you don't already have your call sign on a regular automobile ham plate).

## **Other Motorcycle Plates**

Beginning in the 1990s many new motorcycle plate types were introduced, including Handicapped, Veteran, Disabled Veteran, Children's Trust Fund ("Kids"), Horseless Carriage motorcycle and so forth.

One of the latest such offerings is a motorcycle version of the Purple Heart plate which became available to qualified veterans toward the end of 2014. The application procedure is the same as for an automobile Purple Heart tag. [Las Cruces Sun-News, November 27, 2014, p.A12, c.1]



## **New Mexico's Women Motorcycle Pioneers**

Motorcycling has always been largely the province of men, and in the earliest years it was almost exclusively so. Almost, but not quite.

New Mexico's motorcycle registration records show a small handful of women as the registered owners of motorcycles. One of the earliest was a Miss Nellie N. Johnston of Albuquerque who rode an Emblem twin, which was registered in both 1915 and 1916. It is unknown whether she was any relation to the author.

## **Historical Note About New Mexico's First Motorcycle Licensee**

The 1912 Law had placed responsibility for registration and licensing with the office of the Secretary of State, where the function would remain until 1923. The first person to hold this office was Antonio Lucero who assumed the position in 1912 and left the office at the end of 1918. [*New Mexico Blue Book 1931-1932.*] Antonio Lucero, Jr., the recipient of motorcycle license plate #1, was the son of the Secretary of State, which just goes to show you that it pays to have relatives in high places.

Antonio Jr., born in 1896, was just 17 years old at the time he registered his motorcycle. In order to have been able to secure license #1, and despite his young age, he obviously already had his motorcycle when the license law went into effect. Moreover, Santa Fe's municipal motor vehicle ordinance was still in force until the date the state licensing law became effective, so it is virtually certain that his cycle would have had a Santa Fe pre-state motorcycle plate as well. We will probably never know for sure, though, as those city records appear to have been discarded years ago. (Please see the chapter on "Pre-states" for more information on what these municipal plates looked like.)

In 1916 Antonio, Jr. served a stint working for his father as the Auto Clerk in the Secretary of State's office in Santa Fe. See the photo of the 1916 automobile registration certificate toward the end of the "Passenger" chapter. (Nepotism was commonplace in New Mexico government during Territorial and early Statehood times, and has not entirely died out even today.)

After serving in the Navy in World War I, Lucero, Jr. held important positions in both government and private industry. During 1927-1928 he was a representative for the Cassell Motor Company of Santa Fe, a dealership for Nash trucks, and it is likely that this dealership was the source of the many Nash Quads bought by the New Mexico State Highway Department during this same period. (See the chapter on "Highway Department" plates for more information.) On January 14, 1932, Antonio Lucero, Jr. died of tuberculosis at the age of 36 while under treatment at the Fort Bayard, New Mexico, Veterans Hospital near Silver City. [*El Nuevo Mexicano*, Jueves, Enero 21 de 1932 (Thursday, January 21, 1932), p.1, c.4]

## Early Commercial and Government Motorcycle Users in New Mexico

Many businesses and governmental organizations within New Mexico made effective use of motorcycles within cities not only for transportation, but for delivery of everything from documents to ice cream. Listed here are just a few of them, along with the first year they were known to have put motorcycles into service.

360 Messenger Service, Albuquerque, 1924	Hobbs, City of, Hobbs, 1938
Agee Drug Co., Silver City, 1933	Hutchinson Fruit Co., Santa Fe, 1933
Alamogordo, Town of, Alamogordo, 1933	Kelsey & Archer, Silver City, 1936
Albuquerque, City of, Albuquerque, 1924	Matthew Dairy Co., Albuquerque, 1926
Albuquerque Gas & Elec. Light & Power Co., Alb., 1913	Modern Pharmacy, Albuquerque, 1934
Albuquerque Pharmacy, Albuquerque, 1931	New Hobbs, Town of., New Hobbs, 1937
Albuquerque Police Department, Albuquerque, 1926	New Mexico Public Service Co., Farmington, 1927
AT&SF RR Co., Albuquerque, 1913	New Mexico State Highway Department, Santa Fe, 1923
Auto Motive Services Inc., Albuquerque, 1933	Owl Drug Co., Roswell, 1938
Bacheclin & Co., Albuquerque, 1915	Oasis Farm & Orchard Co, Roswell, 1913
Baldrige, J.C. Lumber Co., Albuquerque, 1913	Pash Bros., Santa Fe, 1913
Berrendo Irrigation-Farm Co., Roswell, 1913	Quay County Motor Co., Tucumcari, 1936
Board of Horticultural Comm., Mesilla, 1916	Pecos Valley Coca Cola Bottling Co., Roswell, 1938
Buchanan Bros., Portales, 1914	Pior Rubber Co., Roswell, 1931
Buck Motor Co., Taos, 1937	Public Food Mart, Albuquerque, 1938
Campbell Ice Cream Co., Clovis, 1938	Public Utilities Co., Carlsbad, 1916
Carter & Bond, Portales, 1937	Raton Supply Co., Raton, 1913
Chino Copper Co., Hurley, 1915	Robinson Art Co., Clovis, 1926
Clovis, City of, Clovis, 1931	Roswell, City of, Roswell, 1933
Continental Oil Co., Albuquerque, 1913	Roswell Gas & Electric Co., Roswell, 1913
Continental Oil Co., Artesia, 1915	Roswell Hardware Co., Roswell, 1913
Continental Oil Co., Roswell, 1914	Roswell News Co., Roswell, 1915
Crescent Garage, Deming, 1914	Santa Fe Cycle Co., Santa Fe, 1934
Darrow Ice Cream Co., Albuquerque, 1936	Seth, John H. Co., Albuquerque, 1926
Del Rico Co., Santa Fe, 1934	Sheres & Eden, Albuquerque, 1915
Farmers Development Co., Springer, 1915	Simonson Cycle Co, Albuquerque, 1934
Farmers Supply Co., Roswell, 1914	Sun Drug Co., Albuquerque, 1936
Firestone Service, Albuquerque, 1937	Sweet Shop, Carlsbad, 1923
Fox Drug Co., Clovis, 1936	Thomas Creamery Co., Albuquerque, 1933
Franciscan Motors Inc., Albuquerque, 1927	U.S. Department of Agriculture, Albuquerque, 1915
French, C.T. Mortuary, Albuquerque, 1937	U.S. Dept of Agriculture, Roswell, 1913
Fuller, D.D. Tire Co., Albuquerque, 1937	U.S. Department of Interior, Santa Fe, 1915
Galles Motor Co., Albuquerque, 1936	U.S. Forest Service, Silver City, 1914
Haffley Bros., Roswell, 1915	United Seed & Fruit Co., Roswell, 1916
Hanna & Hanna, Albuquerque, 1933	White Star Driverless Co., Albuquerque, 1936
Harley Davidson Sales Co., Albuquerque, 1933	Wichita Cycle Co., Hobbs, 1936
Hickox & Seth Co., Albuquerque, 1924	Wood Chevrolet, Clayton, 1931
Hickox Cycle Co., Albuquerque, 1926	

# Percentage of Motorcycle Registrations by Town 1913-1938

Acme	0.05	Crossroads	0.03	Greens Gap	0.03	Mentmore	0.16	San Marcial	0.13
Aden	0.03	Cuba	0.03	Grenville	0.19	Mescalero	0.05	San Rafael	0.03
Agua Fria	0.05	Cubero	0.03	Grier	0.03	Mesilla	0.11	San Simon, AZ	0.03
Alameda	0.16	Cuervo	0.08	Guam	0.05	Mesilla Park	0.70	Sandia Park	0.11
Alamogordo	0.40	Cunico	0.03	Hachita	0.03	Mesquite	0.11	Santa Fe	10.04
Albuquerque	32.22	Dallas, TX	0.03	Hagan	0.03	Miami	0.03	Santa Rita	0.46
Allison	0.05	Datil	0.11	Hagerman	0.32	Mills	0.03	Santa Rosa	0.21
Alma, CO	0.03	Dawson	0.24	Hanover	0.11	Montezuma College	0.03	Savannah, GA	0.03
Alto	0.03	Dayton	0.11	Hatch	0.13	Monticello	0.03	Scholle	0.03
Amarillo, TX	0.11	Deming	1.77	Hayden	0.03	Monument	0.03	Seagraves, TX	0.03
Animas	0.05	Derry	0.03	Hill	0.05	Moriarty	0.05	Seaside, CA	0.03
Anthony	0.19	Des Moines	0.13	Hillsboro	0.03	Mosquero	0.27	Seneca	0.05
Armijo	0.48	Dexter	1.02	Hobbs	0.86	Mountain Park	0.03	Serafina	0.03
Artesia	1.99	Diener	0.03	Hogan	0.03	Mountainair	0.51	Shawnee, OK	0.03
Aztec	0.13	Domingo	0.11	Hollene	0.03	Mt. Dora	0.08	Sherman	0.05
Barksdale Field, CA	0.03	Dominguez	0.03	Hondale	0.19	Muleshoe, TX	0.11	Shiprock	0.03
Barton	0.08	Dona Ana	0.03	Hope	0.08	Nara Visa	0.05	Silton	0.03
Bayard	0.03	Duncan, AZ	0.11	Hot Springs	0.03	Negra	0.03	Silver City	1.80
Bayard Station	0.03	Duran	0.16	Hurley	0.99	New Laguna	0.05	Socorro	0.62
Belen	0.46	Eagle Nest	0.03	Isleta	0.03	Niota	0.03	Solano	0.13
Bellview	0.03	East Las Vegas	1.29	Jackson	0.05	Nogal	0.03	Springer	0.24
Berino	0.08	East Vaughn	0.05	Jal	0.05	Old Albuquerque	0.75	St. Vrain	0.16
Bernalillo	0.64	El Paso, TX	0.08	Jemez Springs	0.03	Omaha, NE	0.03	State College	0.38
Bisbee, AZ	0.05	Elephant Butte	0.08	Jordan	0.03	Orchard Park	0.05	Sugarite	0.13
Black Rock	0.03	Elida	0.08	Kelly	0.16	Organ	0.03	Sunshine Valley	0.03
Bland	0.03	Elmore	0.03	Kenton, OK	0.03	Orogrande	0.03	Swastika	0.16
Bluewater	0.05	Encino	0.05	Keyes, OK	0.03	Otowi	0.19	Tabler	0.03
Brawley, CA	0.03	Endee	0.05	Koehler	0.35	Pajarito	0.05	Tafoya	0.03
Buchanan	0.03	Espanola	0.32	La Cueva	0.08	Parkview	0.03	Taos	0.62
Buckhorn	0.11	Estancia	0.19	La Luz	0.03	Pecos	0.05	Tatum	0.13
Buffalo	0.03	Eunice	0.24	La Mesa	0.24	Peralta	0.05	Taylor Springs	0.05
Cambray	0.03	Fairview	0.03	La Union	0.05	Perea	0.08	Terrero	0.11
Cambridge	0.05	Farley	0.03	Laguna	0.08	Portales	0.54	Texico	0.21
Canutillo, TX	0.03	Farmington	0.32	Lake Arthur	0.56	Prague, OK	0.03	Thomas	0.03
Capulin	0.03	Farwell, TX	0.05	Lake Valley	0.03	Progreso	0.03	Thoreau	0.03
Carlsbad	1.64	Flora Vista	0.05	Lakewood	0.13	Providence, RI	0.03	Trinidad, CO	0.03
Carrizozo	0.35	Folsom	0.03	Lamy	0.11	Puerto de Luna	0.05	Tucumcari	0.75
Carthage	0.05	Fort Bayard	0.24	Las Cruces	1.91	Quemado	0.05	Tularosa	0.16
Causey	0.08	Fort Stanton	0.03	Las Vegas	1.66	Questa	0.16	Turley	0.03
Cedar Crest	0.11	French	0.05	Lemitar	0.03	Radium Springs	0.03	Tyrone	0.35
Central	0.08	Ft. Stanton	0.03	Lockney	0.03	Ranchos de Taos	0.16	University Alb.	0.03
Cerrillos	0.05	Ft. Bayard	0.08	Logan	0.05	Raton	3.01	Upton	0.03
Chama	0.05	Ft. Collins, CO	0.03	Lordsburg	0.40	Red River	0.05	Valedon	0.03
Chamberino	0.05	Ft. Stanton	0.08	Los Angeles, CA	0.03	Regina	0.03	Van Houten	0.05
Chamita	0.03	Ft. Sumner	0.11	Los Cerrillos	0.03	Reserve	0.05	Vanadium	0.05
Chico	0.05	Gage	0.05	Loving	0.05	Rincon	0.05	Vaughn	0.13
Chloride	0.08	Gallegos	0.08	Lovington	0.19	Rodey	0.08	Wagon Mound	0.13
Cimarron	0.21	Gallup	0.97	Madrid	0.05	Rogers	0.05	Wellington	0.03
Clayton	0.86	Gamerco	0.08	Magdalena	0.73	Rosedale	0.03	White Oaks	0.03
Cliff	0.16	Gardiner	0.03	Malaga	0.03	Roswell	7.79	Whitewater	0.19
Clovis	1.83	Garfield	0.03	Maxwell	0.38	Rowe	0.03	Willard	0.08
Colmor	0.05	Gibson	0.08	Maywood, CA	0.03	Roy	0.30	Yankee	0.11
Columbus	0.16	Gilroy, CA	0.03	McAlister	0.03	Saint Vrain	0.03		
Conchas Dam	0.05	Gladstone	0.24	McGaffey	0.05	Salt Lake City, UT	0.03		
Conga Park, CA	0.03	Grants	0.11	McIntosh	0.05	San Antonio, TX	0.03		
Corona	0.08	Greenfield	0.24	Melrose	0.46	San Jon	0.08		

**Registration Data for Selected Motorcycle Plates**  
**Illustrated in this Chapter**  
**and on our companion website at**  
**NMplates.com/Motorcycle.htm**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Plate #</u>	<u>Registered To</u>
1915	12	Lynn R. Cook, Albuquerque, Harley Davidson, 8 H.P. twin
1920	84	L. O. Rister, Maxwell, 1918 Indian Powerplus 61 cu. in. twin
1924	M29	Walter A. McCown, Sherman, 1913 Flying Merkel
1931	M-236	Not issued
1933	M-127	Varner West, Bernalillo, 1933 Harley-Davidson
1934	M-155	F.W. Holmes, Socorro, 1930 Excelsior
1935	M-241	Varner West, Albuquerque, 1928 Harley-Davidson
1936	M-207	Not issued
1937	M-250	Varner West, Albuquerque, 1928 Harley-Davidson
1938	M-39	Ross Bacon, Hanover, 1929 Indian

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following links:

<https://NMplates.com/Motorcycle.htm>

<https://NMplates.com/MotorcycleXandOH.htm>

<https://NMplates.com/Official.htm#OffMC>

<https://NMplates.com/StatePoliceMotorcycleAndPassenger.htm>

# Motorcycle Dealer

Given that automobile dealer licenses were issued beginning in 1913, it's somewhat surprising that motorcycle dealer plates are not known for any year prior to 1966, and in fact all evidence indicates that 1966 was indeed their first year of issue.

This anomaly may be explainable by the fact that what we refer to as "automobile" dealer plates are actually "motor vehicle" dealer plates. If one looks at the letter of New Mexico's early motor vehicle laws, there does not seem to be anything in them that would exclude the selling of motorcycles from being covered by the licenses. Admittedly, though, it would be rather awkward to hang a full-size car dealer plate off the back of a motorcycle being taken out for a demonstration drive.

The earliest cycle dealer plates are identical to regular motorcycle plates in all aspects, including size, color and general layout, save one. The only difference is that the prefix letter "D" is substituted for the "M." They also follow the identical pattern with regard to which years had embossed dates and which years used stickers. The stickers for the years 1969 and 1970 carried the word "DEALER," and the one for 1974 is inscribed "M/C DEALER."

A number preceding the "D" has the same meaning as it does for a car dealer plate, i.e., this number indicates the quantity of plates issued to a particular dealer, or, more accurately stated, it uniquely identifies each of several plates issued to a dealer who received more than one plate under his license. [Department of Motor Vehicles Press Release, Benny E. Sanchez, Commissioner, July 31, 1964]

In 1975 the "D" prefix was changed to "DL" and the colors changed to red on yellow. This format continued into the 1980s, but by at least 1993 the prefix had been changed to a small stacked "DL."

A large "M" prefix was placed in front of the stacked "DL" in 1994, and the color of the plate changed to red on white, a design which lasted through the 1990s.

By 2001 the same prefix was used but the letters were unstacked, such that a full-size "MDL" now preceded the serial number.

New Mexico's Motorcycle Dealer tags were never particularly numerous in any year, and even modern ones are relatively hard to come by. And as is the case with automobile Dealer plates, Motorcycle Dealer plates since the late 1990s have been almost entirely superseded by Demonstration Permits. It will come as no surprise if someday soon we find that they have disappeared altogether.

## Motorcycle Dealer Manufacturer Plates

Though the state never had automobile manufacturers, standard size (6" x 12") Dealer Manufacturer plates were issued to manufacturers of buses and trailers in New Mexico from about the mid-1970s through the early 1980s.

[*Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975; *1978 New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director; and *Impact, Albuquerque Journal Magazine*, August 24, 1982, p.8, c.2] Dealer Manufacturer plates for motorcycles are also known to exist, but only for 1971 and 1972, and only in extremely small numbers. The serial numbers are of the form DM-1, with all known examples having but a single numeric digit. They are in the standard motorcycle plate size of 4" x 7".

Some New Mexico residents recall there having been a manufacturer of motorcycles (perhaps scooters or trail bikes) in the Albuquerque area during the early seventies. If these memories are correct, then the known Dealer Manufacturer motorcycle plates may have been issued to that company.

There are no other known instances of actual motorcycle manufacturing taking place in New Mexico, so it is highly doubtful that motorcycle Dealer Manufacturer plates were ever made in other than the two years mentioned above.

(In 1994 there was an attempt to resurrect the famed Indian motorcycle brand by means of a manufacturing facility to be built in Albuquerque. The driving force was Wayne Baughman, president of Indian Motorcycle Manufacturing Inc., who exhibited a single working prototype that year, but the bike never went into production.)

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# Mounted Patrol

The New Mexico Mounted Patrol is an unpaid all-volunteer police auxiliary organization whose members undergo essentially the same training as all other law enforcement officers in the state. They remain on permanent standby status except when called upon to assist in emergencies and special events. Mounted Patrol Troopers can be called out by the Governor, the Chief of the State Police, or by any county or municipal law enforcement agency.

The existence of the NMMP allows law enforcement agencies to maintain personnel staffing at a level sufficient for day-to-day operations, but then augment their forces during times when additional officers are needed. When called to duty, NMMP Troopers assume the same authority as, and accept the control of, the agency for which they are working.

The Mounted Patrol was formally established at the urging of Governor John Miles, through an Act of the legislature in 1941. [*Laws of 1941*, Chapter 149, effective April 16, 1941. As of 2014, Mounted Patrol plates are governed by the *Laws of 1993*, Ch. 180, § 8.]

Though much of the work of the Mounted Patrol then and now has involved activities such as search and rescue conducted on horseback, the officers' privately-owned vehicles are the primary means of transport. Special license plates for these vehicles were authorized beginning in 1941 and are still available to them today.

There apparently was an over-estimation of the number of persons who would apply to the NMMP the first year, as Mounted Patrol license plates for 1941 are among those most commonly found, and as often as not in unissued condition.

In general the upper rays of the Zia enclosing the date on most types of 1944 plates are truncated, but at least some, if not all 1944 Mounted Patrol tags have the standard full-size Zia.

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://nmplates.com/MountedPatrol.htm>

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# National Guard Officer

National Guard Officer plates—not to be confused with the several varieties of National Guard plates made available beginning in the early 1980s—were first issued in 1932 and their use continued through at least 1941. Specific legislation authorizing this type has not been found, and they may have come about simply through a proclamation by the governor.

The New Mexico National Guard had its roots in the Territorial Militia which was established through an Act passed by the First Legislative Assembly in 1851. The size of the militia rose and fell as it engaged in several campaigns throughout the Indian Wars and the Civil War, but after a period of calm in the late 1800s it was reduced to just one Squadron of Cavalry and one Regiment of Infantry in 1894. In 1897 the Territorial Legislature passed a law which renamed the militia as the New Mexico National Guard. Under the new name, portions of the Guard were called into the service of the regular Army and saw action in Cuba during the Spanish American War, and in Europe during World War I. [*New Mexico Blue Book 1931-1932*, p. 91]

National Guard Officer plates are not known for any year prior to 1932. No such plates are listed in the *Automobile License Register 1931*, nor do they appear in the Comptroller's biennial reports for 1931 or any earlier years. On the other hand, the same reports show 64 tags issued in 1932, confirming that 1932 was the first year this type was put into service. [*Biennial Report of the Comptroller's Department ... for the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Fiscal Years*, R.F. Asplund, State Comptroller, p. 17 (FY 1929 and FY 1930), and *Biennial Report of the Comptroller's Department ... for the Nineteenth and Twentieth Fiscal Years*, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 34 (FY 1931 and FY 1932)]

In 1932 the New Mexico Guard had 79 Officers, 2 Warrant Officers and 959 enlisted men, which was the maximum authorized strength at that time. [*Clovis Evening News-Journal*, June 9, 1932, p.5, c.5] Since the plates discussed in this chapter were issued only to officers, and were entirely optional at that, we can see why there were only 64 issued in their first year. Registration records from the 1930s indicate that a figure of one hundred was the upper limit for most years, and the number probably did not climb higher than that until just before the plates were eliminated prior to World War II.

There were 25 Guard units in the state during that period—almost one for every county—and in fact the motor vehicle registration records from that time show holders of these tags living in all parts of the state. National Guard Officer colors were the same as passenger car colors in all years.

To the dismay of some, National Guard Officer plates were discontinued after 1941, but as of the date of this writing, we have found no government records or contemporary news reports which shed any light on the reason for the termination.

However, legislation was introduced in January 1947 by State Senator Don L. Dickason to permanently prohibit the use of distinctive titles on numbered plates, but would still allow un-numbered auxiliary plates like the 1947 Staff Officer plates which had already been prepared [Gallup Independent, January 31, 1947 p.1 c.5]. Only slightly modified, the bill ultimately was passed into law [1947 Laws of New Mexico, Chapter 15], and Staff Officer plates came to a permanent end after that year. Additionally, the bill's wording would have prevented other similar types of numbered plates, such as National Guard Officer, from making a reappearance. [Las Vegas Daily Optic, February 7, 1953, p.1, c.3, continued on p.6, c.6]

**Registration Data for Selected National Guard Officer Plates  
Illustrated in this Chapter  
and on our companion website at  
NMplates.com/NationalGuardOfficer.htm**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Plate #</u></b>	<b><u>Registered To</u></b>
1933	77	Not issued
1934	46	Lt. W.M. Harvey, Las Cruces, 1924 Maxwell sedan, 2650 lbs
1935	17	Capt Owen L. Wood, Santa Fe, 1934 Chevrolet sedan, 3020 lbs
1936	18	Capt Owen L. Wood, Santa Fe, 1934 Chevrolet sedan, 3020 lbs
1937	100	Not issued
1938	82	Not issued

## Photographs for this Chapter

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# Official

Beginning with New Mexico's very first licensing law in 1912, vehicles owned by governmental agencies within the state were licensed along with privately owned vehicles. Early registration records show vehicles owned by a number of different state, county, and municipal agencies registered at least as early as 1913. The entries in the early handwritten ledgers for plates issued to governmental agencies generally contained the notation "gratis" in the FEES PAID column, indicating that they were free of charge. In the later typeset registers, that information wasn't included, but in all probability tags for them continued to be free.

Tags provided to government vehicles were standard "civilian" license plates issued in sequence along with all the others. There was nothing to distinguish them from any other plate, and this remained the case for nearly two decades.

The first potential for change came in 1923 when the legislature exempted both state and federal vehicles from the licensing requirement, doing so as follows:

"Motor vehicles or trailers owned by and used in the service of the State of New Mexico or any county or municipality thereof, or the United States, or any other State or country need not be registered but must constantly display plates or signs plainly setting forth the name of the State, county, municipality or government in whose service they are operated." [1923 Laws of New Mexico, Chapter 96, Sec. 10]

According to the law, an agency electing to forgo registration would still be required to "display plates or signs" that identified the agency. Arranging to have such plates or signs made probably would have been more trouble than getting a free plate by simply registering the vehicle, and indications from the available records are that most everyone continued to do just that.

The *1928 Motor Vehicle Register*, for example, shows vehicles registered to various governmental agencies at all levels, all over the state. Just one case in point is a block of plates from #1208 to #1241 that were all issued to the City of Albuquerque. Almost all of these happened to be trucks, several of which were fire trucks. The Town of Alamogordo had #33376 through #33381 for some of its vehicles.

After using civilian plates for 17 years, purpose-made Official plates were introduced in 1929. In some subsequent registration records they are listed under the heading “State Official,” but this still included all governmental subdivisions down to the smallest village. Unissued 1929 Official plates numbered as high as 790 are known to exist, which is an indicator that someone grossly overestimated the requirement in that first year, as can be seen from registration records two years later.

In 1931, at least 400 pairs of Official plates were manufactured, and almost all of them were issued. Represented among the recipients was virtually every type of administrative unit one can think of, from county road departments to state colleges to sheriffs to irrigation districts. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1931*]

For reasons entirely undiscovered, no Official plates are known for 1935, even though the *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1935* shows 488 pairs of them having been issued to state, county and local governmental agencies all over the state. The circumstance is particularly puzzling in view of the fact that U.S. Official plates for this year are quite plentiful. Until relatively recently no Highway Department plates were known for 1935 either, even though the records show that 500 pairs were manufactured and turned over to that agency. While the absence of these two types for 1935 remains unexplained, one possibility is that for this one year alone the state required the users of Official and Highway Department plates to return them to the state for destruction at year’s end. Late in 2014, however, two unissued pairs of 1935 Highway Department tags surfaced on the eastern side of the state, engendering hope that one or more examples of 1935 Official plates might yet be found also.

As of September 1936, the total number of pairs of Official tags issued for the year to date was 465. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, September 23, 1936, p.1, c.2 and p.8, c.5]

After another three years had passed, Revenue Commissioner J.O. Gallegos announced that 575 Official plates for state, county, and municipal use were to be manufactured for 1940. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, September 22, 1939, p.1, c. 1] This was likely a far more accurate estimate of need as compared to what had happened in 1931, and in line with the probable growth from the 465 needed in 1936.

During and after World War II the number of Official vehicles increased dramatically, soon numbering in the thousands, driving up the number of Official license plates in lock-step.

Through this entire period, all Official plates were dated, and all were made in passenger plate colors, save for the 1952 and 1953 plates which were reflective—the first such plates in New Mexico to be coated in this fashion, and predating the introduction of reflective passenger plates by a decade.

In 1955 the date was dropped, as was the word “OFFICIAL” a year earlier. Replacing “OFFICIAL” were the letters “OF” as a prefix to the serial number. And from then on the colors were different from passenger colors as well, beginning with a reflective blue on reflective white. Official plates from that point forward would be used for multiple years, being replaced only infrequently.

From their inception in 1929, Official plates had been used on vehicles owned by all of New Mexico’s governmental jurisdictions, including state, county and municipal. Sometime in the early 1960s distinctive plates were introduced for county and municipal vehicles, bearing the prefixes “XC” and “XM,” respectively, with the “X” signifying “exempt.” State vehicles continued to receive plates with the “OF” prefix.

The three classifications reverted to a single type bearing a “G” prefix (for “Government”) in the 1990s, with the “G” moved to the suffix position somewhat later. A distinctly different design with a stacked “SG” suffix (for “State Government”) was introduced in about 2010, and as of the time of this writing in 2020 all indications are that the “SG” plates are only for state agencies, with “G” plates being used at the county and municipal level.

**Registration Data for Selected Official Plates**  
**Illustrated in this Chapter**  
**and on our companion website at [NMplates.com/Official.htm](http://NMplates.com/Official.htm)**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Plate #</u>	<u>Registered To</u>
1931	394	Not issued
1933	466	Not issued
1934	166	Grant County Road Dept., Silver City, 1925 International truck
1936	251	New Mexico School of Mines, Socorro, 1934 Ford sedan
1937	2	Motor Vehicle Dept., Santa Fe, 1937 Chevrolet coupe
1938	530	Not issued

## Photographs for this Chapter

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# Passenger

New Mexico attained statehood on January 6, 1912, and two months later the First Regular Session of the New Mexico State Legislature began work at the capital city of Santa Fe. The proceedings opened on March 11, and adjourned on June 8 after three months of lawmaking. The work of that legislative session came to be known as the *1912 Laws of New Mexico*, and within those statutes, the state's first automobile licensing law was embodied in Chapter 28.

It is important to understand that Chapter 28 was not a *motor vehicle* licensing law, but an *automobile* licensing law. Indeed, the title of the law itself makes that clear, i.e., that it is "An Act to Provide for State License on Automobiles." Absolutely no kind of vehicle other than automobiles is mentioned in the statute. In 1912, therefore, the only type of license plate that existed was a passenger car plate.

This changed with the *1913 Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 19, which was a *motor vehicle* licensing law, requiring *all* motor vehicles to be licensed, effective March 15, 1913. In other words, trucks, motorcycles, and other motorized vehicles now had to have a license. (The only exclusions were "traction engines, road rollers, fire wagons and engines, police patrol wagons, ambulances and such other vehicles as run only upon rails or tracks." And there was no mention of trailers, which don't have motors, and are therefore not "motor vehicles," but these were ultimately pulled into the fold a decade later by the *Laws of 1923*.)

Nonetheless, even with this change, only two new kinds of license plates were introduced, and those were for motorcycles and dealers. Trucks, meanwhile, were issued the same license plates as were being issued to cars. This was to remain the case until mid-1923 when commercial trucks received a separate classification, and, finally, until the end of 1929 when non-commercial trucks also became classified separately. Meanwhile, the only way to differentiate between vehicle types is to look up the license number in the registration records and see what kind of vehicle received a particular plate.

So, to summarize, all 1912 plates, plus all 1913 plates issued January 1 through March 14, 1913, were passenger car plates, while all plates issued March 15, 1913, through December 31, 1929, were passenger/truck plates.

## 1912

Under the 1912 law, automobile owners were required to make application to the Secretary of State and pay an annual fee, which was fixed at ten dollars irrespective of the size of the vehicle. The Secretary in turn issued “consecutively numbered” state licenses (i.e., “registration certificates”), and “furnish[ed] to the licensee one metal tag or plate bearing the initials ‘N.M.’ and the number corresponding to that license.” For this purpose, the office of the Secretary of State supplied a single embossed—but undated—green on white 5½" by 12½" license plate, which had been manufactured by the S.G. Adams Company of St. Louis. A single plate mounted on the rear of the vehicle would be the norm until 1924.

The layout of the plate was fairly simple, consisting of the embossed serial number followed by a rather large embossed, staggered and stacked “NM” at the far right side of the plate. It is known from at least three surviving examples that plates with 3-digit serial numbers had a hyphen (dash) between the number and the “NM,” but we can only guess as to the arrangement of 2-digit and 1-digit plates, as none of those are known to exist today. (These plates were made of steel, as would be all of New Mexico’s plates until the introduction of aluminum in 1947.)

The first registration, for license plate #1, was recorded on August 16, 1912, with that plate going to Louis C. Ilfeld of Las Vegas, New Mexico, for his Velie toy tonneau automobile. (The word “toy” was a Velie designation which meant “small,” much as we would refer to a “compact” car today.) By year’s end, 904 of these 1912 plates had been issued. [*Automobile License Register 1912-1914*]

## 1913

The later 1913 law provided that “All licenses issued under the provisions of Chapter 28, *Laws of 1912*, are extended, without further application or payment of any additional fee on the part of the owners or operators of such motor vehicles, to December 31st, 1913, and persons holding such licenses and numbers are permitted to use the same until such date.” So even though motorists who bought plates in 1912 were expecting to have to spend another \$10 to renew for 1913, they ended up getting a free renewal. (As a result, the plates numbered 1 through 904 could technically be called 1912/13 plates.)

For registrations new in 1913, the license numbering sequence continued from where the 1912 licenses left off, so the first number for 1913 was 905, issued on January 2, 1913. The last license for the year, #1898, was issued on December 22, 1913. [*Automobile License Register 1912-1914*]



Because the 1912 registrations were grandfathered in for 1913, their plate numbers were not duplicated in the registrations for 1913. Additionally, if a vehicle was sold, the plate went with the vehicle. Consequently, the last license issued in 1913, i.e., #1898, is a good indicator of the total number of automobiles in the state at the end of 1913 (less only a handful that might have been wrecked or junked during those first two years).

The new *1913 Law* also brought about a change in the way fees were charged for licenses. Previously a flat ten-dollar fee, from this point forward fees would be based on the horsepower of the vehicle. (This would last until the 1929 legislation changed the basis to the weight of the vehicle.)

For a much more in-depth discussion of the 1912-1913 plates, please see the chapter on "First Issues."

## 1914

At some point it was realized that using the same plate for multiple years was an error, as there was no way to tell by looking at the plate itself if the renewal fee had been paid (especially since the plates were undated). The 1913 law rectified the problem by directing that "The Secretary of State shall adopt a different color each year for the number plate." A fortuitous effect of this provision is that a run of New Mexico license plates is considered by many to be the most colorful of any state. In compliance with the law, the Secretary flipped the 1912-1913 colors, making the new 1914 plates white on dark green.

The same law mandated the inclusion of the state's initials (NM) and specified a minimum size for the plates (5" x 10"), but said nothing about including the year. Beginning in 1914, though, the two-digit year was added in the lower right hand corner, beneath a stacked "NM." An undated passenger plate would not be used again until nearly a half century later, in 1961. The serial number occupied the center of the 1914 plate, embossed in large, bold, artistically designed numerals.

Another innovation for 1914 was the introduction of an embossed border, or rim, which enhanced both the appearance and the rigidity of the plate. (The border was unpainted.) Heavier gauge steel was also used, with all of these features being improvements over the 1912-1913 plates. The size chosen for 1914 was approximately 6" x 11¾", though it should be noted that embossed plates tend to change size slightly as compared to the original flat blank inserted into the stamping machine. By the same token, it is not unusual for plates even within the same year to vary in dimensions by an eighth of an inch or so, depending upon how many digits were embossed, how hard the plate was struck, and so forth.

By year's end 3,090 of the 1914 tags had been issued to cars and trucks, with the last one going out on December 4. This relatively small number easily places 1914 in the very-difficult-to-find category. No unissued plates are known to have survived, and it is presumed that few were left over; those which were probably ended up in the trash heap.

## 1915

The 1915 plates used the identical design and materials as those of 1914, differing only in the date and the color, which for this year was white on red. [*Rio Grande Republic*, January 5, 1915, p.2, c.2] Red pigments are notorious for rapid deterioration in sunlight, and in fact pitifully few 1915 plates with even half-decent original paint are known today. Fragmentary evidence, however, substantiates that the original shade was a brilliant fire-engine red. The paint on the numerals on all surviving examples is found to be crazed, the result of the white paint slowly shrinking over the past century (a characteristic of the numerals on the 1914 plates as well). Nonetheless, the 1915 plate, along with all others of the 1914-1919 design era, is considered to be an exceptionally handsome example of early twentieth century industrial design.

Coincidentally, exactly 5,000 license plates were issued in 1915, with the last one going to Dr. N.O. Huff of Santa Rita for his 20 H.P. Ford on December 8. Remember that the same plates went to both cars and trucks, and out of this 5,000 the Office of Public Roads estimated that about 350 were trucks. (An exact figure could be reached by poring through all 5,000 records of the *New Mexico Automobile Register 1915* ledger, but the time and resources to do this have not yet been found.)

## 1916

Continuing with the same design and layout, the colors for 1916 were a brilliant silver on a deep, dark navy blue background. On most of these plates found today with original paint, exposure to decades of sun and weather has turned the background paint to a chalky, light pastel blue which tends to come off with the slightest touch. The silver numerals often did not fare much better.

A unique feature beginning by at least 1916, and running through 1919, is that those plates with 1-digit serial numbers had the number flanked by a pair of hyphens. For example, the #3 plate for 1916 is of the form -3-. That particular plate, incidentally, was issued to John Gianera, an Italian immigrant who lived in Socorro, but who operated a cattle ranch near Magdalena, some 30 miles to the west. The plate turned up in one of his pastures in the 1980s, found much the worse for wear by his niece (nee Gianera). After an extensive restoration, this #3

plate later found its way into the McInnes collection of #3 plates, but of course was never a McInnes plate itself. Indeed, McInnes had plate #2 in 1916 (its whereabouts today, unknown). McInnes continued to hold #2 all the way through 1923 (all of which are in the author's collection), and both the #2 1917 and 1919 plates (but not 1918) have the "2" flanked by hyphens, i.e., -2-.

What was done in this respect for 1914 and 1915 is unknown, as no 1-digit plates from those years are known today, but the 2-digit 1915 plate #11 (also in the author's collection) has no hyphens at all.

The year closed with a total of 8,228 of the strikingly colorful 1916 plates having been issued, a 65% increase over the preceding year, but still not easily found today, and especially not with good original paint.

## **1917**

The Office of Public Roads statistics for 1917 show 15,250 automobiles, plus an estimated 1,000 trucks registered in New Mexico for this year, making a total of 16,250, or just about double the number of such vehicles in the previous year. The colors were black on light orange, and for the first time the raised border was painted. The color of the border is the same black as on the numerals and letters. The layout, of course, is the same as all others in the 1914-1919 era.

New Mexico plates from 1917 are not exceptionally rare, but they are difficult to find with nice original paint.

## **1918**

New Mexico's license plates for 1918 are an enigma in several ways. For one thing, the Secretary of State's office bought two distinct types of plates during the year, commonly referred to as the "thin" variety and the "thick" variety. The first of these were stamped on sheet steel blanks that were little more than half as thick as the state's other plates, either before or after. The embossing on these plates is quite shallow; that is, the numerals and letters have little relief. Colors are medium blue on battleship grey, which provides little contrast and renders the plates virtually unreadable at other than close range. The thin variety began at plate #1 and is known for plates up to approximately #14000.

The thick variety is pretty much conventional in both materials and embossing, with the colors being very dark navy blue on olive grey. On a few known unissued specimens, the navy blue is so dark as to appear black without close inspection. The serial numbers of this variety pick up where the former leave off, and are believed to run from approximately 14000 to 19000.

The difference in appearance between the two types is so striking that the natural conclusion is that two different manufacturers were involved, though this has yet to be confirmed.

A degree of variation in the shade of the grey background color on both varieties is found, ranging from dove grey to a fairly dark olive grey. Whether these are actual differences from different paint lots, or the result of aging and exposure to the elements is unknown. And many persons who have repainted the later thick variety have mistakenly painted the numerals and letters in a light blue that is in fact far too light even for the earlier thin plates.

Of the teen years, license plates from 1918 are perhaps the most commonly found. Interestingly, a great many of these are from the 18000 series, while the Office of Public Roads statistics show a total of only 17,580 cars and trucks registered for the year. Registrations had been increasing on the order of 60% to 90% each previous year, but growth for 1918 was only about 8% over the prior year, a reflection of the recession which began during the last year of World War I.

When the Secretary of State's office placed its initial order for 1918 plates (which might have been done as early as mid-1917), the coming recession was simply not yet on the horizon, and it appears that more plates were ordered than proved to be needed. In any case, the vast majority of these high-numbered plates have been found in severely rusted condition, an indication that they were dumped en masse and not found until decades later.

This was perhaps not soon enough for a Mrs. Lemley, who placed a classified ad in the *Las Cruces Sun-News* for November 12, 1948, p.5, c.3. The ad read as follows: "(WANTED TO BUY) Will Pay \$3.00 for New Mexico 1918 license plate. Mrs Lemley, 160 West Greening."

## **1919**

The final plate of the 'teens era reverted to the robust heavy-gauge steel and bold embossing of pre-1918, and was painted black on white, with the embossed border receiving the black color along with the numerals and letters. National economic growth and motor vehicle registrations remained together in the doldrums for yet another year, with registrations advancing only 3% over 1918. Like the plates from the previous two years, 1919 plates are not difficult to find, but specimens with nice original paint are few and far between.

## 1920-1923

Early in the first quarter of 1919—and perhaps even earlier than that—a determination was made to introduce multi-year license plates as a means of saving money. Under a strict interpretation of the earlier motor vehicle law this was not possible, as the *1913 Law* mandated that the plate be a different color each year (and was reiterated in the *1915 Compilation of the Laws of New Mexico* with no change).

Thus, implementation of the plan required new legislation, which was codified in the *1919 Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 150. In that law, Section 9 said, “... the Secretary, without additional charge, shall also cause to be issued to the owner of such motor vehicle, with the first registration only, one metal number plate and a distinguishing seal of suitable material of such size and form as the Secretary shall determine, which seal shall be of a distinctly different color for each calendar year, and there shall be at all times a marked contrast between the color of the letters and figures and the background of the seal; *Provided*, however the same Combination of colors may be repeated after five years. Seals to be furnished each year thereafter upon payment of the annual license fee.”

This paved the way for New Mexico’s relatively short-lived porcelain era from 1920 through 1923. The annual revalidation seals (what we today often refer to as “tabs”) complied with the law by virtue of their change in color each year, i.e., red for 1921, silver for 1922, and yellow for 1923. The letter of the law required a seal for the initial year, 1920 as well, and this was met by the blue “1920” baked into the porcelain base plate itself.

The layout of the porcelain plates was governed by their unusual shape—a long, narrow 4½" x 14½". A small “1920” was fired into the porcelain at the left end, surrounded by three small rivet holes for attachment of the revalidation tabs in subsequent years. The center portion of the plate was occupied by the serial number, with space for up to five digits. At the far right was a stacked “NM”. The numerals and letters were blue, placed on a white (some would say off-white) background.

Effective July 1, 1923, as a result of provisions included in the *1923 Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 96, Commercial Cars and Commercial Trucks were split off as separate categories of vehicles, and from that point forward were required to have license plates that were distinctive from those used by passenger cars. In fact, commercial vehicles which were already licensed, and, hence, already had porcelain plates, had to replace the porcelains with new embossed steel 1923 commercial plates no later than July 1.

The original plan was for the porcelain plates to be used for five years [Santa Fe New Mexican, November 14, 1919, p.5, c.4], but for a variety of reasons the system proved to be unsatisfactory, and they were dropped a year early [Santa Fe New Mexican, August 22, 1923, p.5, c.3].

Please see the chapter on “Porcelains” for a far more in-depth discussion of New Mexico porcelain plates.

## 1924

Dissatisfaction with multi-year plates brought about a return to standard embossed steel plates for 1924. The size was 5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>", just slightly smaller than the standardized size of today's 6" x 12" plates. Across the bottom appears “N.M. 1924”, with the remainder of the plate reserved for the plate serial number.

An article in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* for October 26, 1923, p.2, c.4, announced that these plates were going to be yellow and orange, but this clearly was a typographical error, as such a color combination would be unreadable. And, in fact, the correct colors of black on orange were stated within the body of the article. The black included the raised border outlining the plate.

And for 1924, New Mexico for the first time issued plates in pairs, with the requirement that a tag be mounted on both the front and back of the vehicle. Whatever the intentions might have been, this turned out to be an additional source of grief for motor vehicle officials, who already were dealing with a citizenry disposed to evasion of licensing fees, which itself was one of the major reasons for abandoning the porcelain plates in the first place.

Many residents who owned two cars took to mounting one plate of the pair on each car, thereby avoiding registration fees entirely on the second vehicle. These wealthier two-car owners, the ones most able to pay, seemed to be the ones most inclined to cheat the state's coffers. There would be a fix for this in the coming year.

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, vehicles classified as Commercial Cars and Commercial Trucks had been placed in separate categories of their own, and were receiving their own distinctive license plates as of July 1, 1923.

So did that mean that New Mexico's generic passenger/truck plates were now true, pure passenger plates as of 1924? No, not quite. Non-commercial trucks, such as those used by farmers and other private individuals were not affected by the law, and continued to be licensed the same as cars. The *1919 Law* had stated that “Motor trucks equipped with pneumatic tires shall be considered,

for licensing purposes, the same as automobiles,” and as long as they weren’t in commercial service, nothing changed. New Mexico’s passenger plates would continue to be generic passenger/truck plates for a few more years, until the 1929 *Laws* provided for complete separation of the two types beginning in 1930.

## 1925

Stung by the cheats of 1924, the state had the two plates of each 1925 pair embossed separately “FRONT” and “REAR.” If the trick brought in any additional revenue, information on the fiscal results has not been found. Legend has it, though, that New Mexicans traveling out of state were deemed to be so stupid that the state had to label their cars for them so they could tell one end from the other. Whether fact or fable, the experiment lasted only the one year, and the designations were dropped the following year.

The 1925 plates were of identical size, design, and layout as the 1924 plates, excepting of course the stacked “FRONT” or “REAR” at the left hand side, and with the colors being white on black.

Meanwhile, since at least 1912, automobiles in New Mexico were subject to property tax at the county level in the same fashion as real estate. Section 6 of the 1912 law stipulated that once a year all County Assessors were to provide to the Secretary of State a list of all automobile owners in their respective counties. The purpose of this was to provide a cross check on vehicle owners who might be inclined to evade registration and payment of the required fee. Of course a lot of the people so inclined also failed to report their automobiles to the county assessors, so the system was not foolproof.

It was so bad, in fact, that in 1925 the State Comptroller, R.H. Carter, sent a letter to all known motorists, notifying them that because fewer than 40% of vehicle owners were paying the required property tax, the legislature had taken action to ensure compliance. [*Laws of 1925*, Chapter 82, Section 6] The county assessors were required to prepare special automobile assessment rolls showing assessed valuations, and provide that roll to their county treasurers. Special forms were being provided by the Motor Vehicle Department to the county treasurers. These forms would be used as a receipt showing proof of payment of the property tax. This receipt had to be attached to the automobile owner’s application for his 1926 license plate, and if it was not, the car would not be registered and no license plate would be issued.

(This procedure was considered by many to be double taxation, and was lifted in 1929 when the state barred the assessment of property tax on any motor vehicle which was duly registered with the state. [*Laws of 1929*, Chapter 119, § 32])

## 1926

New Mexico's 1926 plates are another one of those anomalies that is difficult to understand. Aside from measuring a rather bizarre 4½" x 12", the plates are painted a virtually unreadable red on grey. This was the same color used on 1924 Commercial Car plates, and one would think that someone would have learned his lesson from that blunder, if not already from the equally unreadable blue-on-grey 1918 plates.

The anomalous size is attributable to the 1926 tags having been stamped out at the Oklahoma State Prison, which made Oklahoma plates in a similar shape (but different dimensions) in 1925. Perhaps there was some attractive financial incentive to induce the state to forfeit conventionality for monetary savings.

## 1927

In mid-1926 the news was announced that plates for the coming year of 1927 would for the first time bear the Indian sun symbol, or "Zia." [*Gallup Independent*, July 30, 1926, p.7, c.4] Not mentioned was the fact that the 2-digit year would be encircled by the Zia, or that the name of the state, which had been abbreviated in every previous year, would be spelled out in full. And little did anyone know at the time that this milestone event was to dictate the appearance of New Mexico's license plates for years to come. Other than the partial abbreviation "NEW MEX" used in 1932, not a single year has since passed without the inclusion of both the Zia and the full spelling of the state's name.

The colors for 1927—black on yellow—were also identified in the *Gallup Independent* piece, and though the headline reversed the colors, the body of the article got it right.

To the relief of many, the rather unconventional size of the previous year's plate was discarded in favor of a 6" x 12" tag, which was to be used through 1931, and which itself was a harbinger of what was to become a permanent configuration twenty-nine years later.

## 1928

A press release from Assistant State Comptroller H. Charles Roehl carried in media outlets supplied the information that 58,000 pairs of gold-on-dark blue automobile license plates had been ordered for 1928, along with 3,700 pairs for commercial cars and trucks. [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, November 1927, p. 14] This total of 61,700 was not terribly far off from the actual final total of 65,737 registrations tallied by the Bureau of Public Roads after the end of the year, but it does indicate



that an additional order of some 4,000 pairs was necessary at some point to meet demand.

The description of the color of the numerals and letters being “gold” was not entirely accurate, as they turned out to be yellow—very similar to the background color of the previous year’s plates. Meanwhile, the 6" x 12" size established in 1927 was maintained.

## 1929

Mr. Roehl’s announcement for 1929 was carried in the December 1928 *New Mexico Highway Journal* (p.20). The new plates (same size and layout as the previous two years) would “... have tulodian red numerals on a cream yellow background.” It’s not entirely clear what “tulodian” means, but the plates are indeed red on cream yellow—mirroring the colors of the state flag for the first time, the flag itself having been adopted only four years earlier, in 1925.

Roehl said that “70,000 [pairs of] plates were ordered for 1929 — 5,000 more than were ordered for 1928,” and that “All but a few of the 1928 plates were used.” This confirms that there indeed had to have been a second order in 1928 to meet demand. The same size and layout of 1927-1928 continued.

At the same time, the *Laws of 1929*, Chapter 119, Section 28, brought about a change in the method of calculating the license fee. The former method of basing the fee on horsepower was abandoned in favor of a system based on the weight of the vehicle, a system which remains at least partially intact to this day.

## 1930

For the third year in a row Mr. Roehl issued an advance notice concerning license plates for the coming year. These, he said, would be gold on black. [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, August 1929, p. 26.] In fact, when received they turned out to be butterscotch on black, but for an interesting twist on this, see the chapter on “Governor” plates, which actually did receive gold paint. The configuration and dimensions of passenger plates were unchanged from the previous three years.

After nearly two decades of New Mexico’s primary license plates being a generic passenger/truck combination, the types were finally split into separate categories, and passenger plates for the first time became true, pure passenger plates. Much more detail on this transition, and the history leading up to it, will be found in the chapter on “Truck” plates.

## 1931

Nineteen thirty-one would be the last time for years to come that New Mexico's license tags would be made in the 6" x 12" size. Not until a quarter century later would her plates return to this size, and then only after a national agreement that all states would standardize their plates to these dimensions.

But for now, and for the fifth and final year, 1931 plates carried the same design, layout and dimensions that were introduced in 1927. Only the colors changed, this year being essentially the reverse of those in 1930, announced the previous August as being black on yellow. [*Clovis Evening News-Journal* August 4, 1930, p.5, c.4] Once again though, the "yellow" was more of a butterscotch, similar to that which had appeared on the numerals on the 1930 tags.

## 1932

As motor vehicle department officials would soon learn—and much to their chagrin—New Mexico motorists had become strongly attached to the Zia symbol which had been introduced on their license plates five years earlier. When it was made known that the Zia would be omitted in 1932, the state's motoring public pitched a fit. Somewhat chastised (but apparently not quite enough), the decision was made to reinsert the Zia, but in a dinky little size that was too small to incorporate the 2-digit year. Instead, it was used only as a separator to improve readability on plates having 4- and 5-digit numbers, coming just before the final three digits. [*Albuquerque Journal*, October 14, 1931, p.1, c.7]

On the other hand, to the delight of motorists then and collectors now, the double Zia format was introduced on passenger plates for the first time. All passenger plates having three or fewer digits, i.e., those numbered from 1 to 999, got two Zias—one on each side of the serial number. This was a popular innovation that would last until the advent of county number prefixes in 1947.

New Mexico's 1932 plates were of a distinctly different design than those of any other year. Measuring about 5½" x 12½", these white-on-dark green plates carried the state's nickname, "SUNSHINE STATE," horizontally across the bottom. At far left was a stacked "NEW" over "MEX" over "32". Some of these changes were unquestionably brought about by the switch to a different manufacturer for this year alone. The plates were made by a Denver company, and the similarity to Colorado's 1932 and 1933 plates is seen in the dies used for both states. (See the chapter on "Manufacturers" for more details.)

Another major change that came about in 1932 was the introduction of the debossed (recessed)—and therefore unpainted—outer rim. New Mexico would

retain this design feature for 21 years, until the raised and painted border was reintroduced in 1953.

## 1933

1933 was to be the last year for decades to come that New Mexico's license plates would be made by a commercial manufacturer. Nonetheless, the size, design and layout established a pattern that would last with essentially no change through the end of the 1930s, and with but little change for another 16 years beyond that.

With a large Zia encircling the 2-digit year, and three-quarter-inch-tall block letters proclaiming "NEW MEXICO" across the bottom, these roughly 5¾" x 13¼" red-on-dark-yellow plates provided a large piece of real estate for the serial number. The tags were ordered in numbers that turned out to exceed the state's requirement for the year. Registrations actually decreased as compared to the previous year, a manifestation of the deepening Depression, and this was one of only a couple of occasions outside of World War II when there was such a decline.

As a result of the over-production, hundreds of pairs of the excess plates survive to this day, still in their original envelopes, and most of them pretty much unscathed. Many of these are in the 62000 series, but other blocks of numbers are known as well.

An interesting side note to the 1933 registrations is that this was the first of several years (not all consecutive) when a number "zero" plate was issued as a regular civilian license plate. The records show that J.A. McNabb, Jr. received passenger plate #0 for his 1931 Buick sedan. He also received plate #0 in 1934 for a 1933 Chrysler sedan. The #0 did not reappear again until 1938, when the number was again registered to McNabb, this time for a 1935 Pontiac coupe. A 1940 civilian plate #0 in poor condition is known to exist but, unfortunately, no records at all have been located for that year to reveal who the original owner was.

During this time period, motor vehicle registration in New Mexico was handled by the office of the State Comptroller, headed up by Juan N. Vigil. The Assistant Comptroller in 1932 and 1933 was J.A. McNabb, Jr., who apparently used his position to issue plate #0 to himself. Although McNabb was not in office when the 1934 and 1938 plates were issued, New Mexico at that time had a policy whereby a person could request, and receive, the same plate number that he/she held in a prior year. That would have enabled him to get #0 again the following year, and again in 1938. (Meanwhile, Comptroller Vigil took plate #1 for himself in 1934.) [*Automobile License Directory 1933*, *Automobile License Directory 1934*, and *Automobile License Directory 1938*; Letter from J.A. McNabb, Jr., Assistant State Comptroller, to Byron O. Beall, Chief Tax Commissioner, July 5, 1932; and letter from J.A. McNabb, Jr., Assistant State Comptroller, to Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, January 9, 1933]

## 1934

In the summer of 1933, equipment was purchased and installed at the New Mexico State Penitentiary for the manufacture of license plates. [*New Mexico Magazine*, August 1933, p.38] (See the chapter on “Manufacturers” for more details on the events leading up to this change.)

As the 1933 plates had already been made by the Gopher Stamp & Die Co. through a contract let in 1932, the prisoners set about making 1934 plates for the coming year. All of the design features were retained from 1933, but with two barely noticeable changes. First, the dies are a little wider and bolder. Second, two elongated bolt slots were added at the bottom edge of the plate, for a total of four slots. Previously (with the exception of the porcelain years), New Mexico’s tags sported only two slots at the top edge, in addition to the four corner holes that had always been present. The bottom slots were positioned further outboard than those at the top, a rather unusual configuration that was retained until all four of the slots were eliminated in 1951.

The dimensions remained the same at roughly 5¾" x 13¼", though as pointed out elsewhere, size variations of up to an eighth of an inch or so are seen on all of these plates, even within the same year. The colors were reversed from the previous year, now becoming a dark yellow on yellowish-red.

In what was to be one of only four years known (1933, 1934, 1938, and 1940), a civilian #0 passenger plate was issued in 1934. Please see the section immediately above, on the 1933 plates, for more details.

## 1935

With operations now on a roll, the penitentiary plate shop cranked out nearly 93,000 pairs of plates in its second year. Other than the new date and the new colors—white on dark blue—everything about the 1935 plate was identical to that of the previous year.

With the design now essentially static, most of the descriptions from here through 1946 will primarily be a discussion of color changes.

## 1936

Dark blue on white, and according to Bureau of Public Roads statistics, this was the first year that New Mexico exceeded 100,000 total registrations, though passenger cars accounted for just 77% of the overall number. [BPR statistics.]

## 1937

John Bingaman, Commissioner of Revenue, announced in mid-1936 that the plates for 1937 would be “Navajo red on turquoise blue.” [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 23, 1936, p.1, c.1] (Despite the fancy words, a perhaps more apt description would be maroon on robin’s egg blue.) Bingaman further stated that though the state colors, red and yellow, were the most frequently suggested, those colors were going to be “preserved for the state cuarto centennial year, 1940.”

Probably for neither the first nor the last time, there was an incident in 1937 of license registration fees being embezzled. Mrs. Maggie Pruett of Carrizozo was convicted in September of taking more than \$800 in motor vehicle license fees while acting as license plate distributor for Lincoln County. She was sentenced to 1½ to 2½ years in prison on a charge of embezzling state funds, but after serving a little more than a month in the slammer she was granted a complete pardon and restored to citizenship by Gov. Clyde Tingley. The pardon was effective on November 15, and Mrs. Pruett’s bonding company reimbursed the state for the loss. [*Albuquerque Journal*, December 18, 1937, p.9, c.2]

## 1938

The new 1938 plates were displayed at the governor’s office on October 7, 1937, and it was said of these tags that the “black numerals shine out on a bright yellow field.” [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, October 7, 1937, p.1, c.6]

1938 was one of only four years known (1933, 1934, 1938, and 1940), when a civilian #0 passenger plate was issued. For more details, please see the section above on the 1933 plates.

## 1939

Black on deep orange.

## 1940

For some years tourism officials had been planning state-wide activities and celebrations to take place in commemoration of 400th anniversary of the journey through New Mexico by Spanish explorer Francisco Vázquez de Coronado y Luján. There was considerable advance publicity during the preceding several years, with the goal of attracting tourists in large numbers. One of the actions taken was to add the words “CORONADO CUARTO CENTENNIAL” (Coronado Fourth Centennial) across the top of the 1940 license plates. In order to make room for the slogan, it was necessary to reduce the height of the numerals of the serial number from their former 3½ inches to 3 inches.

For this one year the arrangement of the Zia symbol was modified as well. Instead of the date being in the center of the circle, the date 1540 was split into “15” and “40” with these two halves placed at the upper left and upper right corners of the sun’s rays, and the numerals of the current year also split and placed at the lower left and lower right corners of the Zia’s rays.

The colors were dark yellow on bright red, but as is the case with most red pigments, the background faded quickly in New Mexico’s bright, high-altitude sun. Because the Coronado slogan made these plates unique, they were saved by countless motorists after year’s end, and thus are among the most commonly found from this era. But because of the severe fading, it is rare to find one of these plates today in a condition that truly reflects the richness and brightness of the original colors.

A civilian passenger plate #0 was issued during 1940 and survives to this day (albeit in poor condition), but there are no known surviving registration records to tell us to whom it was originally issued. It is one of only four years known (1933, 1934, 1938, and 1940), when such a plate was issued. Please see the section above on the 1933 plates, for more details.

## **1941**

During the latter half of the 1930s, as plans were being formulated for the Coronado Cuarto Centennial, tourism officials decided that New Mexico’s longtime nickname of “Sunshine State” should be discarded. Replacing the former sobriquet would be “The Land of Enchantment.” This slogan was placed on her license plates for the first time in 1941, where it has remained ever since. The wording was the same size as, and occupied the same space across the top of the plate as the previous year’s Coronado slogan. Hence, it was necessary that the serial number numerals remain at the same reduced 3" height, since “The Land of Enchantment” was here to stay. (Florida, once the “Citrus State” and the “Orange State,” didn’t pick up new Mexico’s discarded Sunshine State slogan to use on its license plates until 1949.)

Colors were the reverse of those for 1940, becoming bright red on dark yellow, and the 2-digit year was returned to the center of the Zia. Automobile registrations reached 97,127 this year. [Public Roads Administration statistics.]

## **1942**

With the expectation that passenger car registrations would exceed 100,000 in 1942, black-on-white plates with serial numbers having as many as six digits were manufactured for the first time. These plates were made before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and as it turned out, war-caused shortages of fuel and

other materials actually caused registrations to decline, coming in at only 86,073 for all of 1942. [Public Roads Administration statistics.]

## 1943

It was not just America's own combat years in World War II which created shortages of strategic materials and foodstuffs. For a couple of years running, prior to America's direct involvement in the war, the U.S. had been shipping vast quantities of raw materials and manufactured war goods to her allies. The shipments accelerated with the passage of the Lend-Lease act in March 1941. So severe were the shortages of steel that in early November of that year Antonio C. De Baca, Chief Clerk of the Motor Vehicle Division, announced that in all probability there would be no metal license plates made for 1943. [*Clovis News-Journal*, November 2, 1941, p.1, c.2] (The 1942 plates had already been manufactured and were ready for distribution, so it was too late to do anything about the coming year.)

The December 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor which thrust America directly into the shooting war sealed the fate of metal plates for 1943, and the decision was finalized that paper windshield stickers would be used in lieu of regular tags.

For a much more in-depth discussion of these wartime substitutes, please see the chapter on "1943 Windshield Stickers."

## 1944

Within a year of America's entry into the war, there was already no doubt as to the ultimate outcome, though another three years of bloody fighting lay ahead. Indeed, even before the Japanese planes had returned to their carriers from Pearl Harbor, Admiral Yamamoto, is reputed to have said, "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant."

By mid-1943 America's industrial production had increased to the point where steel could be spared for domestic consumption, and the decision was made to reinstate metal license plates in New Mexico. A significant step was taken in the name of conservation, however, in that the practice of using two plates was suspended. Single plates, therefore, were issued in white-on-black colors. The design for 1944 was the same as prior and subsequent years, with one interesting difference: The Zia was made larger this one year, which made it necessary to partially lop off the symbol's top rays to make it fit.

## 1945

White on medium blue, single plate issued only.

## 1946

Dark brownish-red on bright yellow. Single plate issued only.

## 1947

At the end of World War II the United States found itself with literally tens of thousands of unneeded military airplanes, including those flying and others still undergoing assembly in factories across the country. The vast majority of these were scrapped, making available untold quantities of aluminum at bargain basement prices for reprocessing into civilian products. A number of states—New Mexico among them—took advantage of this new source of supply and began making license plates out of aluminum. (In future years, New Mexico would switch between aluminum and steel from time to time as prices and availability fluctuated.) Aluminum plates were made for New Mexico for 1947, but for this one last year the state continued its austerity measure of issuing just one plate per vehicle.

The post-war economic and manufacturing surge in the civilian sector drove New Mexico's passenger car registrations over 100,000 for the first time this year. (Counting trucks and other vehicles, the grand total was over 165,000.)  
[Public Roads Administration statistics.]

Meanwhile, state officials had long discussed the idea of having some feature on license plates which would identify the county of residence of the vehicle's registered owner, and such a system was finally implemented in 1947. The counties were numbered from 1 to 31. Santa Fe County, the location of the capital, was given #1. All the remaining counties were numbered according to the total number of motor vehicle registrations for the last full year for which complete statistics were available, i.e., for 1945. (Remember that the 1947 plates were manufactured in 1946, before complete numbers were known for that year.)  
[*Hobbs Daily News-Sun* December 3, 1947, p.1, c.3-4]

The county number became a prefix on the tags, followed by the Zia symbol with the 2-digit year in the middle. The serial number then followed the Zia. For much more detail on the county numbering system, please see the chapter on "County Allocations and County Prefixes."

The state intended that the background color of the '47 plates be red, but the bulk of the paint shipped by the supplier was the wrong color. The fortuitous result was a very attractive burnt reddish-brown plate with dark yellow lettering. Some 27,000 plates that already been painted red had to be redipped in the brown paint, however. [*Gallup Independent*, November 20, 1946, p.1, c.8] Otherwise, the 1947 plates were identical to those of other recent years.



## **1948**

An ever-increasing supply of raw materials for manufacturing heralded a return to two license plates in 1948. These aluminum plates were white on dark blue, and the tags were otherwise the same as the preceding year except for the date.

A fly in the ointment was that the county number prefix system now in place dictated that the counties be numbered according to the total number of motor vehicle registrations for the last full year for which complete statistics were available, which this time was for 1946. Because several counties had changed rank on the list as compared to 1945, the list was thrown out of whack and a new list had to be drawn up. Hence, though Santa Fe County was kept at the top of the list, the county prefixes changed for many other counties and the license plates were renumbered accordingly.

## **1949**

The layout from the previous several years remained unchanged, with only the year and the colors—dark blue on white for this year—altered. There was a dramatic difference in the aluminum blanks from which the plates were stamped, however. Instead of the smooth sheets of aluminum used in the past, the blanks for 1949 were stamped with a three-dimensional grid-like texture, commonly referred to as a “waffle” surface. Prior aluminum plates were prone to fatigue cracking caused by road-induced vibration, and it is believed that the waffle pattern imparted rigidity to the plate which resisted damage of this type.

Meanwhile, after the previous year’s fiasco of stirring up the prefix numbers after just one year of use, somebody realized that changing the county numbers every year entirely defeated the purpose of having the prefixes in the first place. As a result, a decision was made to leave them alone in the future and use the 1948 county number ordering indefinitely.

Again, for much more detail on the county numbering system, please see the chapter on “County Allocations and County Prefixes.”

## **1950**

After using leftover aluminum blanks in early production runs for 1950 plates, a return to steel was made, probably as a matter of both price and increasing availability. Colors were white on dark blue with all other design features except the date remaining unchanged. A major change came about late in 1950 with the introduction of significantly thinner (i.e., narrower) dies, though relatively few plates were made using them.

## 1951

Virtually unknown to aficionados of New Mexico license plates is the fact that steel shortages similar to those experienced during World War II reappeared in 1951. The result was that the plate plant at the State Penitentiary ran out of steel at mid-year, halting production of metal plates. In their stead, paper windshield stickers à la 1943 were issued to some 5,500 vehicles beginning in late July. The 1951 stickers were issued in *pairs*, as compared to the wartime stickers which were issued as singles. A few months later, sufficient steel was obtained to not only meet the need for tags for the rest of the year, but to replace the stickers on the 5,500 vehicles which had not received metal plates earlier. On October 28 it was announced that all of the vehicles which had received their stickers now had their metal tags. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, October 28, 1951, p.A3, c.5]

As rare as the 1943 windshield stickers are, there is not a single surviving example known of the 1951 windshield stickers other than a few samples, making it possibly the most rare of all New Mexico plates! Please see the chapter on “1951 Windshield Stickers” for much more detail on these enigmatic tags.

For the standard 1951 metal plates, the new thinner dies introduced late the previous year were used for all 1951 production runs. The four bolt slots which had been in use since 1934 were dropped, leaving only the four bolt holes. The bolt holes, which had always been in the corners since 1914, were moved a couple of inches inboard, to positions close to where the slots had been. (Bolt slots were reinstated on a few late-production plates.) The colors were flipped again, becoming dark blue on white.

## 1952

1952 plates got off to a terribly rocky beginning, and in fact almost never made it out of the starting gate. By March of 1951, a looming materials shortage was seen for the coming year. In that month Ed Brosseau, head of the motor vehicle department, declared that windshield stickers would be used in lieu of metal plates in 1952. He had elected to go the sticker route rather than use metal tabs on the '51 plates, he said, because the current plates weren't adapted for tabs. “Besides,” he added, “every Indian tin smith in the country would get rich copying them.” [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 22, 1951, p.16, c.6]

All the while, Brosseau was petitioning the National Production Authority (NPA)—the short-lived peacetime equivalent of World War II's War Production Board (WPB)—for more steel.

In May Brosseau reiterated his opinion that unless he was able to get a priority rating for allocation of steel, “everybody will be using stickers” in 1952. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 20, 1951, p.1, c.2]

By August of 1951 the situation for 1952 looked so bleak that Brosseau solicited bids for 260,000 windshield stickers. No final decision had yet been made, he said, but “We’re getting set up so we can go either way.” The bid specifications were for stickers at least 3¼" x 5", to be white plus two other colors yet to be determined. [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, August 8, 1951, p.1, c.2]

At about the same time, the state’s purchasing agent, G.T. McWhirter, postulated that the state would have to resort to “1952 tabs” affixed to the 1951 plates, perhaps unaware of Brosseau’s recent solicitation for bids on stickers. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, August 9, 1951, p.B6, c.7]

Shortly thereafter Brosseau said that he had placed an order for steel for 1952 plates, and that he had verbal assurance from government officials that the state would get a priority allocation. But until the state received a guarantee in black and white, he would go ahead and have a bid opening on August 23 for the 260,000 stickers for which he had recently solicited bids. [*Clovis News-Journal*, August 19, 1951, p.7, c.3]

The picture got enormously brighter less than two weeks later, when federal approval came through for 75 tons of steel, which would arrive at the State Prison on October 1. That would be enough for half of the 1952 requirement, Brosseau said, and he was confident that enough steel would be received later to meet the other half of the state’s needs for 1952. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, August 30, 1951, p.1, c.3] The order did come through on time, and the prison began stamping out 1952 plates. Continuing with the thinner dies from the previous year, the colors were changed to red on white.

1952 saw a drastic change when the 2-digit date was taken out of the center of the Zia symbol and moved to the upper left corner of the plate. This brought to a close a quarter century run of having the date inside the Zia (excepting 1932). [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 1, 1951, p.B2, c.4]

It has been stated over the years, but never confirmed, that one or more Indian tribes had complained that having the date inside of the Zia desecrated the symbol, prompting the decision to move the date. No record of such a complaint has ever surfaced, and it seems more likely that the date was moved to the corner—where it was adjacent to a bolt hole—to facilitate attachment of a metal renewal tab which would cover the old date, should tabs have become necessary. This more-likely scenario is supported by the ongoing worries over steel shortages affecting supplies even for 1953 and 1954, and proposals that plates be kept for five years, with renewals being accomplished with metal tabs.

In order to fit the 2-digit date in the upper left corner, it was necessary to eliminate the word “THE” from the slogan “THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT.” The shortened version would be used from then on, through numerous later revisions of license plate design. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 1, 1951, p.B2, c.4]

Meanwhile, the Zia symbol itself remained in its usual place as a separator between the county number and the serial number. The inboard placement of the bolt holes introduced the previous year continued, with a few late-production plates having corner bolt holes.

## 1953

Anxieties over the availability of steel spilled over into the planning for 1953 plate production as early as 1951. In December of 1951 Assistant Motor Vehicle Commissioner C.C. Boatwright said that even though New Mexico had already made application to the federal National Production Authority for steel for the 1953 plates, he had received a “Washington dispatch saying states have agreed to make 1951 or 1952 plates last indefinitely.” As a consequence, Boatwright expected New Mexico’s request to be disapproved. [*Albuquerque Tribune*, December 20, 1951, p.30, c.1]

In a positive turn of events, by the middle of 1952 the state had received enough steel to make all of its 1953 plates. But Motor Vehicle Commissioner Tony Luna said that the new plates would have to last five years. “After 1953 little metal tabs will be attached to the plates from year to year, bearing the numerals ’54, ’55, etc., showing that the current year’s license has been paid for.” [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, July 1, 1952, p.1, c.1 and *Albuquerque Journal*, July 2, 1952, p.7, c.2]

When the 1953 plates went into production, slightly thicker dies (as compared to 1951-1952) appeared, but not as wide as the 1950 and earlier versions. Colors were white on burnt red, with “53” in the upper left corner. A 21-year run of having a debossed rim was broken with the reintroduction of an embossed and painted border. The embossed border was probably reinstated not so much for the sake of appearance, but as a means to help secure the expected date tabs in the coming years. The length of the plate was slightly increased from the longstanding 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", to 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ ".

Two major milestones were passed in 1953, with passenger registrations exceeding 200,000 for the first time, and total registrations for all vehicle types running to more than 300,000 for the first time.

And all the hand wringing proved to be for naught, as the nation’s steel production caught up with demand. Multi-year plates and date tabs were not implemented after all.

## 1954

Continuation of the previous year's layout, including the increased 13¾" length. Colors red on white, "54" date.

## 1955

This would prove to be the last year for long plates, whose length had been roughly 13¾" from 1933 to 1952, and about 13¾" from 1953 to 1955. The design remained the same as in 1954, with colors being dark yellow on burnt maroon, and with a "55" date. (Officially, the colors were announced as "gold on maroon." [Clovis News-Journal, October 15, 1954, p.2, c.4])

## Important Note

**The primary focus of the earliest editions of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book was on the years through 1955. The later editions, including this one, provide detailed coverage all the way up to the present time because information on many aspects of these years has not been published elsewhere, and is otherwise unfamiliar to the student of New Mexico license plates. Photographic coverage extends to the present as well.**

## 1956

Every state in the Union standardized its license plates to 6" x 12", beginning with the 1956 license year. (A few states didn't complete the transition until 1957, but New Mexico was with the majority in meeting the 1956 target.) The change was brought about in part at the urging of auto manufacturers who were able to reduce costs by having uniform license plate mounting areas on their bumpers. Colors were white on reddish-brown. The two-digit date "56" appeared twice on the plate—once in the lower left corner, and again in the lower right corner.

Just three years after passing the 200,000 mark, passenger car registrations shot past 250,000 in 1956.

## 1957

The identical layout was used for 1957, the only difference being the date and the colors of dark green on white. As in 1956, the 2-digit year appeared in both the lower left and the lower right corners.

In the county number prefix system, those counties with two digit numbers had space for only four digits to the right of the Zia symbol, allowing for at most 9,999 plates in each county. This was fine until some of those counties reached 10,000 or more registrations, a condition which first occurred in 1957. Among the earliest to reach this milestone were counties 16 and 17 (San Juan and Rio Arriba, respectively). The solution was to reduce the size of the two county number digits and stack them vertically at the left side. This freed up space for one more digit, allowing up to 100,000 registration numbers in each of the respective counties before the plates would again run out of room. [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, June 19, 1957, p.4, c.2] A side effect of this layout was that it was necessary to eliminate the extra “57” that was in the lower left corner on those plates with a stacked county number. (Please see the “County Allocations and County Prefixes” chapter for more details.)

## **1958**

Tags for 1958 were essentially identical to the previous two years except that instead of displaying the two-digit date twice in the lower corners, the four-digit year 1958 was split into “19” which was placed in the lower left corner, and “58” which was placed in the lower right corner. Colors were red on yellow, along with slightly modified dies. Plates for 2-digit counties omitted the “19.”

## **1959**

Colors were flipped to yellow on red, with all other characteristics remaining the same as in 1958. For the first time, passenger car registrations in Bernalillo County (Albuquerque) alone exceeded 100,000, necessitating the use of letters in place of the left-most numeric serial number digit after that milestone was passed. For the state as a whole, passenger car registrations surpassed the 325,000 mark.

## **1960**

In spite of all the talk in the early 1950s of having to resort to multi-year plates and renewal tabs, the event was staved off until 1960. A small red metal tab with a flat surface, on which a 1960 renewal sticker was pre-affixed, was issued to cover up the embossed “59” in the lower right corner of the plate. The tab had a small projection on the left with a hole that matched up with the license plate’s lower right bolt hole, and another small projection on the right that was to be bent around the edge of the plate. The bolt secured the sticker tab to the plate, and the bent projection kept it from rotating out of position. (ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner notes that the sticker-on-tab arrangement was unique to New Mexico, and was never used on passenger plates of any other state.)

The renewal stickers themselves, having red printing on a reflective white background, had their own serial numbers, which did not match the original plate’s serial number. They did not match, that is, if you don’t count sticker #1, which went to John Burroughs for his Governor license plate #1.

Only one tab with sticker was issued to each vehicle. Car and truck owners were instructed to keep both 1959 plates on the car and attach the tab to the rear plate. Motorists were cautioned that even though a tab was used only on the back plate, the front and rear plates had to match each other. [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, November 13, 1959, p.1, c.1] New registrations—of which there were about 15,000 in 1960—would have had to have been issued 1959 plates to go with the tab, but reports of the time conflict as to whether they got one plate or two. If they were to conform to the instructions given to re-registrants, though, they would have had to have received a matching pair.

## **1961**

The metal tab was found to be a somewhat clumsy way to implement a multi-year plate. So, for 1961, a red-on-white undated plate was issued with both of the lower corners unencumbered by embossing. This left a smooth surface for placement of self-adhesive renewal stickers in subsequent years.

These undated plates were produced in two varieties, and for the first time a reflective background was used on a civilian plate (certain state government vehicles began receiving reflective plates in the early 1950s). But identical plates were later manufactured with a plain painted white background. See the next section, “1962-1964,” for more details.

It was at this point that the state made an unambiguous and permanent switch from two plates, to a single plate to be carried on the rear of each vehicle. Existing law had mandated two plates, so new legislation was required. The 1961 legislature passed such a bill, but to the surprise of everyone, Governor (1961-1962) Edwin L. Mechem vetoed the bill, declaring that one plate per car was “unconstitutional.” How he came to such a conclusion is puzzling to say the least, particularly in light of the fact that the state had used just one plate on two previous occasions, 1912-1923 and 1944-1947. Nothing in the constitution aroused anyone else’s ire during those years.

The question was taken to the State Attorney General’s Office by State Representative Mack Easley of Hobbs, sponsor of the measure. The AG’s office in turn said that the governor’s conclusion was wrong. The State Legislature could override the veto and the law would stand, said Assistant AG Harlan Flint. [*Clovis News-Journal*, March 9, 1961, p.2, c.5.]

In fact the law did stand, as it has for over a half century now, and it is unlikely that New Mexico will ever revert to using two plates. [*Laws of 1961*, Chapter 95]

## **1962-1964**

The undated 1961 base plate was renewed 1962-1964 with annual stickers. New registrations during these years still received an undated 1961 base with the current year sticker on it. Popular belief has long held that New Mexico issued

two styles of undated base plates concurrently in 1961, i.e., reflective white and painted white, and did so through 1964. In fact, the reflective bases were dropped as a cost saving measure and entirely replaced by painted plates. The reflective coating was 3M's proprietary (and very expensive) Scotchlite which then cost 46 cents per plate, vs. 16 cents for regular paint. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 5, 1962, p.2, c.1] Once the decision was made and the existing supply of Scotchlite was exhausted, the switch was implemented, taking place in late 1962. With a half million plates to be manufactured each year, the savings was substantial.

In summary, reflective plates were issued in 1961 and 1962 (and were renewable through 1964), then were entirely discontinued and replaced by painted base plates beginning in late 1962 (which were also renewable through 1964). Consequently, though there are two different varieties of base plates for this period, they are actually from different years, and only in 1963 and 1964 were both on the road at the same time. (A few passenger and trailer plates issued very late in 1962 are known to be on painted bases; there may be other very late 1962 types on painted bases as well.) The paint, incidentally, was an alkyd melamine "plastic" paint which was said to be highly durable and was already in use in California for those plates. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 5, 1962, p.2, c.1]

## **1965 and later**

From this point on there would be additional changes in design and colors, including the introduction of various graphic features on the plates, not to mention several switches back and forth between aluminum, steel and galvanized steel. A few of the more significant milestones are described in the paragraphs below.

## **1969**

One small but notable event was the introduction of the letters "USA" following the state name, beginning in 1969. This was done in an attempt to educate the astonishing number of geography-challenged Americans who have no idea whatsoever that New Mexico is one of the fifty U.S. states, and think instead that it's a foreign country. Alas, after more than fifty years of this back-bumper teaching effort, there is no indication that the population at large has gotten any smarter.

## **1972**

No doubt the most substantial change to New Mexico's passenger tags in the post-1965 era was the abandonment of the county number system beginning with the 1972 plates. It was at this time that the 3-letter, 3-number serial number format was introduced. This was later reversed to a 3-number, 3-letter configuration in about 1991, which coincided with the introduction of graphics incorporating both Native American artwork and a silhouette of the yucca, New Mexico's state flower.



## **1979**

By about 1979 embossed dates had been abandoned permanently, and all plates—whether new issues or renewals—were dated with stickers showing the year of expiration. Staggered registration was introduced on April 1, 1982, such that from this time forward the stickers showed both the year and the month in which the plate would expire. (See the chapter on “Dealer” plates for an interesting exception to the staggered registration system.)

## **1991**

Beginning in 1991, truck plates as a unique type were eliminated, and trucks since then have been issued passenger car plates, a practice last in place more than six decades earlier. Truck and car tags are now indistinguishable from each other, just as they had been in the years prior to 1930.

## **1999**

After more than 65 years of continuous operation, the license plate manufacturing plant at the New Mexico State Penitentiary was permanently shut down at the end of 1998, and production was farmed out to a private company in Canada effective January 1, 1999. Please see the chapter on “Manufacturers” for more detail on this transition.

## **2000**

The very popular hot air balloon graphic plate was made available as a no-extra-cost option (vs. the standard red-on-yellow plate) in about 2000. Hundreds of thousands of these plates were subsequently issued.

## **2001**

Since their inception in 1960, the serial numbers on renewal stickers had no direct relationship to the serial numbers of the plates themselves. In 2001 the serial numbering system on the stickers was changed such that the sticker serial matched the plate serial. This was done for all types of plates, not just those for passenger cars.

## **2010**

In connection with the celebration of the upcoming 2012 centennial of New Mexico’s statehood, a completely redesigned yellow-on-turquoise graphic “centennial” plate was introduced in 2010. Most of these were new issues which expired in 2011, but they could also be obtained as replacement plates for existing

tags which were due to expire in 2010. Consequently, a very small number of 2010 turquoise plates exist as well. The turquoise plate is slated to be available indefinitely, alongside the traditional red-on-yellow plate. Motorists are given the choice of which style they receive at the time the vehicle is registered. The Automobile License Plate Collectors Association (ALPCA) conferred its annual Best Plate award for 2010 to New Mexico for the turquoise design.

Despite a lot of grumbling about the turquoise tags being difficult to read at other than close range, they have become wildly popular with New Mexico motorists. A down side to their introduction, however, was that the colorful hot air balloon plate was simultaneously discontinued.

## **2016**

The Centennial slogan at the top of the turquoise plates was removed because it was no longer timely. Turquoise plates are still available, though, now with the Land of Enchantment slogan moved up from the bottom of the plate to take the place of the Centennial slogan. Additionally, the letters "USA" which had not previously been used on the turquoise tags, have been added after the state name.

## **2017**

On July 10, 2017, the New Mexico MVD released the long awaited Chile plates which celebrate the state's world renowned status as the "Chile Capital of the World." These are regular issue plates available at no extra cost for automobiles, trucks and motorcycles, and for the same vehicles as vanity plates at nominal extra cost. Given the enormity of their initial demand, they may turn out to be the most popular design of all time. (Meanwhile, the yellow yucca and turquoise tags both remain available to those who prefer the earlier designs.) The Chile plate received the 2017 Best Plate award presented by the Automobile License Plate Collectors Association (ALPCA), becoming the second New Mexico tag to receive that honor after the Turquoise plate in 2010.

## **Additional detail on Passenger Plates of the Modern Era**

A great deal of important additional detail regarding the modern era of New Mexico's passenger plates is presented in the April 2020 issue of ALPCA's *PLATES* magazine, p.17, under the title "New Mexico Passenger Car License Plates 1910-2020" by Bill Johnston. Copies of this back issue are available from ALPCA and can be viewed on the NMplates.com website at:

<https://NMplates.com/PassengerPlatesArticle.htm>

## Registration Data for Selected Passenger Plates Illustrated in this Chapter

<u>Year</u>	<u>Plate #</u>	<u>Registered To</u>
1912	201	R.L. Miller, Deming, 30 H.P. Overland touring.
1913	1179	A.S. McNaghten, 20 H.P. Ford 5-passenger.
1914	378	A.G. Simms, Silver City, 24.5 H.P. Reo touring.
1915	11	A.C. Loveless, Clayton, 20 H.P. Ford touring.
1916	2870	E.G. Minton, Roswell, 27.6 H.P. Overland touring.
1917	2	W.J. McInnes, Lake Arthur, 20 H.P. Studebaker touring.
1918	2	W.J. McInnes, Lake Arthur, 20 H.P. Studebaker touring.
1919	2	W.J. McInnes, Lake Arthur, 1917 Dodge touring.
1920	2	W.J. McInnes, Roswell, 1917 Dodge touring.
1921	310	E.G. Minton, 310 W. Alameda, Roswell, 1919 Buick touring.
1922	5340	Van W. Lane, Estancia, Buick touring (year model not given).
1924	449	A.F. Sisneros, Española, 1924 Buick touring.
1926	21188	E.G. Minton, Roswell, 1924 Buick touring.
1926	27682	A.F. Sisneros, Española, 1924 Buick touring.
1927	1	Arthur T. Hannett, Santa Fe, 1925 Cadillac sedan.
1928	118	Owen L. Wood, Santa Fe, 1917 Ford.
1931	68-312	Not issued.
1932	64-882	Not issued.
1933	62-378	Not issued.
1934	17-082	M. Goggins, Hagerman, 1917 Ford roadster.
1935	61-074	Celso E. Romero, Mora, 1935 Ford coupe.
1938	87-349	Rudy L. Prochaska, Hobbs, 1937 Terraplane brougham.
1942	16-310	E.G. Minton, Roswell, car model not recorded.
1943	33100	E.G. Minton, Roswell, car model not recorded.
1946	3	W.J. McInnes, Roswell, car model not recorded.
1986	HKL-911	W. Johnston, Las Cruces, 1930 Buick, Model 60
2010	LHW-049	W. Johnston, Organ, 1949 Diamond T pickup, Model 201

## Errata

### **1912/13 Last Plate Number in previous editions of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book**

A typographical error involving the last plate number of the 1912/13 first issue plates crept into previous editions of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book, including the first printing of the Fourth Edition. The error is relatively minor, but was replicated in several places.

Please see the last page of the “First Issues” chapter of this edition for information on where corrections should be penciled into the earlier editions.

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter’s text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/PassengerCar.htm>

# Porcelains

New Mexico came late to the porcelain scene, long after other states had tried the type and abandoned it. On the surface, porcelain plates seemed like a good idea; they're much more heavily constructed than the plates they superseded, and the porcelain coating promised a potentially indefinite lifetime. Weighing in at just under a pound, they were double the weight of any of the plates used by the state previously.

Under earlier legislation a new plate had to be issued each year, but multi-year plates were authorized by the state legislature when on March 17, 1919, it passed a new motor vehicle law, to become effective January 1, 1920. Porcelain plates were touted by some to be "permanent," though when the decision was made to switch to the new type, Manuel Martinez, the Secretary of State, announced that "license plates issued ... for automobiles, motor trucks and motorcycles for 1920 will be good for five years." In accordance with the law, renewals in 1921, 1922, 1923, and 1924 would be validated by "small seals ... fastened to the plate." The seals are what many of us today call "tabs." [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 14, 1919, p.5, c.4] (Mr. Martinez held the office of Secretary of State 1919-1923. [*New Mexico Blue Book*, 1931, p. 41])

Just two weeks later the Secretary announced that an order had been placed for 11½ tons of plates, and that the first 17,520-pound installment on the order was already in transit to New Mexico from the manufacturer in Los Angeles. The remaining 5,000 pounds were to follow at a later date. At a pound per plate, the initial delivery of some 17,500+ plates was expected to be sufficient to meet the demand for all current motor vehicle owners at the beginning of 1920, when distribution would start on January 1. The additional 5,000 pounds (5,000 plates) would bring the total order to about 22,500 plates. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 26, 1919, p.6, c.1]

The first eight tons of plates arrived in Santa Fe just before the middle of December, with the Secretary of State announcing that he would begin distributing them to persons who had already submitted their applications. [*Gallup Independent*, December 11, 1919, p.1, c.2, reprinted from the *Santa Fe New Mexican*]

The porcelain plates cost the state 26 cents each [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, October 26, 1923, p.2, c.4] plus 2 cents freight [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 26, 1919, p.6, c.1], for a total of 28 cents each. The name of the specific Los Angeles manufacturer was not given in news reports of the day, but its identity can be inferred with reasonable certainty. Eric Taylor, arguably the most knowledgeable expert on U.S. porcelain plates, conjectures that it was the California Metal Enameling Company which made the

plates, for the following reasons: That firm had made the 1916-1919 California porcelains, but the Golden State was permanently switching to tin plates in 1920. The California porcelains are quite similar in appearance to the New Mexico porcelains, and since the Los Angeles company would no longer be making the former plates, it was an ideal time to enter into a production contract with the state of New Mexico. Meanwhile, no other similar manufacturing facility in Los Angeles has been identified for that time frame. (The California Metal Enameling Company was also known by its trademarked nickname, CAMEO.)

As that company's name suggests, the plates that we refer to today as "porcelain" were actually called "enameled" plates during the time they were in use. And many people who grew up during the 1920s and 1930s called them "granite" plates. The latter name derives from a type of porcelain-coated cookware in popular use during that period. Although there were many colors available, one of the most common was a mottled grey that looked very much like granite rock. The hardness of the coating reinforced the connection to the name.

New Mexico issued four types of porcelain plates: Passenger, Motorcycle, Highway Department and Dealer. These types are discussed individually in the following paragraphs.

## Passenger Porcelain Plates

It would not be until mid-1923, in compliance with the 1923 Motor Vehicle Law, that any New Mexico vehicles other than motorcycles would receive distinctive plates. (Dealer plates were a separate exception in their own right.) Therefore, any given porcelain "passenger" plate can actually be for either a car or a truck. Moreover, it can be for either a civilian or a government vehicle. So when it comes to calculating numbers of plates, we can only look at the numbers for motor vehicles as a whole. And to some extent, for the porcelain years we can make only estimates. But there are a few things we know for sure.

The *New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1923* shows a total of 17,999 renewals for 1923, though this figure was current only through July 1 of that year. But under normal circumstances, renewals of prior-year plates had to be effected by January 31, with a stiff penalty for late registration. So in spite of the suspiciously round number of renewals, it's reasonably safe to say that most of these roughly 18,000 vehicles were carried forward from 1922.

The same publication explicitly states that the **first plate number issued in 1923 was number 37412**. The highest porcelain number known to exist is just below 49000, so this means that roughly **11,589 new base plates were issued in 1923** (i.e.,  $49,000 - 37,412 + 1$ ), bringing the total number of registrations in 1923 to about 29,589 (i.e.,  $18,000 + 11,589$ ).

(As will be seen elsewhere, the new categories of commercial car, commercial truck and motor truck came into being on July 1, 1923, and were issued new tin plates, but the majority of these already had porcelain plates from earlier in the year, so those don't change the totals for 1923. Only vehicles of these special categories which were newly-purchased in the last half of the year could have added to the total. Extrapolating backward from the registration figures from later years, we can surmise that only about 200 or so such vehicles (and porcelain plates) might have been added in the latter half of the year were it not for their early switch to tin.)

Registration records have not been found for the latter part of 1920, any part of 1921, or the first half of 1922, but in mid-December 1920 the Secretary of State's office announced that registrations had just passed the 22,000 mark [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, December 14, 1920, p.3, c.5]. A month later the Assistant Secretary of State, Edith Wileman, announced a final figure, saying that "The office [had] issued slightly more than 22,000 during the last year." [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 15, 1921, p.1, c.2]

Prior-year records show New Mexico registrations dropping off sharply every December, and even more so in late December. For example, in 1915 there were only 17 registrations in December (out of 5,000 total for the year), none of which were in the second half of the month [*Automobile License Record*, 1915]. In 1916, there were but 7 registrations in December (out of 8,228 for the year), and again none in the second half [*Automobile License Record*, 1916]. This trend would suggest that total December registrations in 1920 were probably fewer than 50, and at best a mere handful in the last two weeks of the year. For our purposes, then, we will simply use the figure of **22,000 new plates issued in 1920**.

Skipping ahead two years to early December of 1922, Mr. Martinez's office announced that, for the first 11 months of the year, 8,276 plates had been issued for new registrations. [*Gallup Independent*, December 7, 1922, p.2, c.3] Knowing what we know about December registrations, and extrapolating this out to the end of December we can estimate a total figure of, say, **8,300 new registrations for 1922**. We already know that the **first plate number issued in 1923 was 37,412**. Subtracting the 8,300 figure gives us an approximate **first plate number of 29,112 for 1922**.

The same announcement stated that the 11-month grand total of new registrations, plus seals issued for re-registrations, was 25,410 for 1922. Subtracting the 11-month new registration figure of 8,276 yields **17,134 re-registrations** up to that point. Since re-registrations had to have been accomplished by the end of January to avoid a hefty fine, we can assume that the 17,134 figure was essentially unchanged a month later, at the end of December.

The sum of the 12-month new registrations (8,300) and the re-registrations (17,134) allows us to arrive at a figure of 25,434 total registrations for 1922, of which 33% were new and 67% were re-registrations.

The December 7<sup>th</sup> announcement also revealed a total of 22,707 combined new and re-registrations for the prior year, 1921. This information is corroborated by statistics published by the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, showing that 22,711 motor vehicles were registered that year (of which 152 were motorcycles) [Engineering News-Record, May 25, 1922].

Unfortunately, the new and re-registrations are not separated from each other in either of these reports, but we can estimate them as follows: First, the proportion of new registrations was increasing slightly each year, such that the 33/67 ratio from 1922 should be adjusted just slightly to about 31/69 for the prior year of 1921. With the adjusted ratio we can estimate about **15,668** re-registrations and **7,039 new registrations for 1921**.

Subtracting the 1921 new registrations (7,039) from 1922's estimated first plate number (29,112), we get an estimated **first plate number of 22,073 for 1921**. That is very, very close to the total of "slightly over 22,000" that Miss Wileman reported as the total number of plates issued in 1920.

The numbers of renewals (re-registrations) estimated above for 1921 (**15,668**) and 1922 (**17,134**) are corroborated by the Secretary of State's 1922 biennial report, which, though using obviously rounded numbers, gives **16,000** renewals for 1921 and **17,200** for 1922. [Report of the Secretary of State Manuel Martinez ... Ninth and Tenth Fiscal Years, 1921-1922, p. 5. (FY 1921 and FY 1922).]

Of course these estimates are just that, and could be in error by a few hundred in either direction, so let's round them off so that we're not trying to make ourselves look like we know more than we actually do. That allows us to come up with a reasonable-looking table for all four porcelain years:

#### Passenger Porcelain Base Plates Issued

Year	Newly Issued	Total to Date	First Plate #	Last Plate #
1920	22,000	22,000	1	22000
1921	7,100	29,100	22001	29100
1922	8,300	37,411	29101	37411
1923	11,200	49,000	37412	49000

**Notes: (1)** Remember that the above table shows only the year-on-year progression of the issuance of base plates (and, hence the approximate starting and ending base plate numbers for each year). It purposely does not incorporate any of the re-registrations described above.



(2) We do not know if the “slightly over 22,000” figure for 1920 did or did not include motorcycles, of which there were about 165. [*State of New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1920*] On the other hand, we do know that the 1921 figure of 22,707 did include 152 motorcycles [*Engineering News-Record*, May 25, 1922], of which only about 50 would have been new registrations that received plates. This is barely two-tenths of one percent of the total (new and renewal combined) registrations for that year. The difference is well within our round-off error, and the same would be true for all of the other porcelain years.

## Varieties of New Mexico Porcelain Passenger Plates

As was pointed out earlier, through mid-1923, when the porcelain era was almost over, there were only three distinctively different porcelain license plates issued, i.e., passenger, motorcycle and dealer. But within those categories there were three varieties of “passenger” plates alone, referred to as Types 1, 2 and 3.

**Type 1.** Plate number center in blue numerals on a white (some view it as off-white) background, stacked “NM” far right. Dated “1920” at the left side of the plate in small blue numerals which are a part of the porcelain base plate design. The “1920” is surrounded by three small rivet holes for later attachment of annual revalidation seals which will hide the “1920” when so attached. Dimensions 4½" x 14½". These began with plate # 1, with the highest plate number known (as recorded by ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner), being 22280. It is reasonable to suppose that the changeover to Type 2 plates occurred at a round number, perhaps 22500, which is the same as the estimate of the initial order quantity from California.

**Type 2.** Same as Type 1, but without the “1920”; i.e., the plates are undated, and become valid only by using the three rivet holes for attachment of the annual revalidation seals. (These plates also use a noticeably darker blue in the numerals and letters, though it’s not clear if this change was exactly coincident with the deletion of the “1920” date.) ALPCA archives show the lowest number known as 22636, and the two highest known being 47157 and 47161. Interestingly, the serial number on the matching 1923 #47157 seal on the plate of that number is hand-stamped rather than machine-embossed, with the font of the stamped numerals apparently identical to that of the hand-stamped numerals on the Dealer and Highway Department seals. The unique method of numbering this seal almost certainly had something to do with the transition from Type 2 to Type 3 plates. It is not known if the #47161 seal was hand-stamped, as the seal was missing from that plate when found.

**Type 3.** Same as Type 2, but with the rivet holes eliminated as well as the date. A logical presumption is that the rivet holes were omitted when the state found itself in need of about another couple thousand plates toward the end of 1923, by which time the decision had already been made to switch back to embossed tin plates for the coming year. Since there would be no new seals coming for 1924, there was no need for rivet holes to mount seals on this last batch of plates, so the holes were

simply dispensed with. The lowest number known is 47504, and the highest 48958. Again, presuming the changeover from Type 2 to Type 3 occurred at a round number, 47501 would be a likely starting point, and 49000 the likely end point for Type 3. (The low and high plate numbers for all types come from verified observations compiled by Eric Tanner for the ALPCA archives.)

## **Renewal Seals for Porcelain Passenger Plates**

Most of us call these “tabs” nowadays, but the correct name as used at the time was “seal,” and no other term was ever employed. These were small metal medallions which were attached to the porcelain base plates in the years after 1920 as proof that the vehicle registration had been renewed for the current year. Each seal bore the 4-digit year for which it was valid, along with a serial number. The serial number on the seal matched the number on the plate only for new registrations, i.e., only if the plate and seal together were “natural” for the respective year of issue. There is no letter prefix on passenger car seals as there is on Dealer seals.

**1920** There were no “seals” as such issued the first registration year, the baked-in porcelain “1920” by itself serving that purpose. Some might say that a careful reading of the 1919 laws (effective January 1, 1920) raises a question as to whether the Type 1 plates as used during calendar year 1920 were in compliance with the stipulation that the Secretary of State “issue to the owner of such motor vehicle, with the first registration only, one metal number plate and a distinguishing seal of suitable material of such size and form as the Secretary shall determine, which seal shall be of a distinctly different color for each calendar year...”

It appears, though, that the plates did comply to the satisfaction of the authorities, because the law leaves it entirely to the discretion of the Secretary of State as to the material of the seal (porcelain in this case), and the color (blue, which is different from all the later seals), both attributes thereby meeting the letter of the law.

**1921** Plates issued in 1921 that were new issues began at about number 22001 (see above). These received embossed steel diamond-shaped seals painted red, with serial numbers matching the plate number. Plates which had been originally issued in 1920, and which were revalidated for 1921, received the same seals, but with serial numbers beginning with #1, on a first come, first serve basis. There was no danger of overlap in the seal serial numbers between new issues and renewals because even if every car registered in 1920 was re-registered in 1921, only seal numbers 1 to 22000 would be required, and in fact only 16000 were renewed. The seal serial numbers were machine-stamped from the front (as compared to the 1923 seals which were embossed from the back).

**1922** Plates issued in 1922 that were new issues began at about number 29101 (see above). These received embossed steel octagon-shaped seals, said to have been painted silver, with serial numbers matching the plate number. Plates which had been originally issued in 1920 and 1921, and which were revalidated for 1922, received the same seals, but with serial numbers beginning with #1, on a first come, first serve basis. For the same reason as mentioned above, there was no danger of overlap in the seal serial numbers. As was the case in 1921, the seal serial numbers were machine-stamped from the front (as compared to the 1923 seals which were embossed from the back).

Note regarding 1922 seal color: As long as anyone can remember, common belief has been that the 1922 seals were silver in color. However, we have never found any contemporary references which would either confirm or refute this. Confounding the issue, every surviving 1922 seal with original paint is black. We see two possible explanations for this. First, silver paint in the old days contained real silver. Silver and many silver compounds turn black with exposure to sunlight (think emulsion on black and white photographic film). Perhaps they really were silver to start with, but turned black in the sun. Or, second, the story that the seals were silver could be wrong. Perhaps they were black all along. Yet a third possibility is this: The 1922 seals were made of galvanized steel, and since most examples of these tabs are found with no paint at all the crystalline structure of the galvanizing shows quite prominently. If one is asked to say what color this metal is, it would not be unreasonable to call it “silver.”

**1923** Plates issued in 1923 that were new issues began at number 37412 [*New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1923*]. These received embossed steel 6-pointed star-shaped seals painted yellow, with serial numbers matching the plate number. Plates which had been originally issued in 1920, 1921, and 1922, and which were revalidated for 1923, received the same seals, but with serial numbers beginning with #1, on a first come, first serve basis. For the same reason as mentioned above, there was no danger of overlap in the seal serial numbers. As contrasted to the 1921 and 1922 seals whose serial numbers were machine-stamped from the front, the 1923 seal numbers were machine-embossed from the back, such that the serial numerals are raised rather than depressed.

## Switched Passenger Seals

It is not uncommon to find that a seal has been switched from one porcelain license plate to another. Often this happens because a plate has been found without a seal, and the person in possession of the plate wants it to appear as it would have during one of the renewal years. To do this, a seal for the desired year is obtained and affixed to the plate on hand. Or perhaps the plate has a seal that's in bad condition, and the person swaps it out with one in better condition. The problem is that this is usually done without any regard to whether the seal is “correct” for the plate in question.

Of course there is really only one “correct” seal for any given year, and that is that seal that was officially issued to it upon renewal, assuming the plate was even renewed in the first place. If it wasn't, then no seal at all can be truly correct for that plate.

But even if a plate *was* renewed, how can we know what seal is correct for it? Since the registration renewal records for the porcelain years are known to survive only for the first half of 1923, and not at all for either of the other two porcelain renewal years, there is a limit to how much we know with certainty. But using the figures seen earlier in this chapter, we can come up with an accurate range of seal serial numbers for both new issues and renewals for each of the three affected years.

Recapping, we recall that for any one of the years 1921, 1922 or 1923, a newly issued plate received a seal with a matching serial number. A renewed plate from an earlier year received a seal with a serial number below that of the number of the first new plate issued in the current year. That information, combined with the known numbers of newly-issued plates and renewals enables us to prepare the following table.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Plate Serial #'s</b>	<b>Seal Serial #'s</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1921	1–22000	1–16000	Only 16000 renewed, plate and seal #'s do not match.
1921	22001–29100	22001–29100	New plate. Seal serial matches plate serial.
1922	1–29100	1–17200	Only 17200 renewed, plate and seal #'s do not match.
1922	29101–37411	29101–37411	New plate. Seal serial matches plate serial.
1923	1–37411	1–18000	Only 18000 renewed, plate and seal #'s do not match.
1923	37412–47500	37412–47500	New plate. Seal serial matches plate serial.
1923	47501–49000		No seals attached.

The seal serial numbers for all newly-issued plates are known exactly, because they match the plate numbers. The 1923 renewal seal serials 1–18000 are known exactly because the registration records survive for these. For 1921 and 1922, we know only the range that a renewal seal has to fall in, i.e., 1–16000 and 1–17200, respectively. Seals in the three serial number “gaps,” i.e., 16001–22000 for 1921, 17201–29100 for 1922 and 18001–37411 for 1923, would not have been issued.

## Counterfeit Seals

At some point beginning in the late 1970s or early 1980s a troubling number of counterfeit seals were fabricated (including even plastic ones!). This was done under the guise of making “reproductions” to satisfy the demand for seals for display on porcelain plates without them. This was an unfortunate occurrence, as there are more than enough genuine seals in circulation to put on all of the New Mexico porcelains worthy of display. But now one must be wary of every seal seen, and give it close inspection. Fortunately, the fakes are not particularly well done. All of the ones that I’ve seen have been cast rather than

stamped, and their features are not as clear and sharp as on genuine seals. They also make a different sound when dropped on a hard surface. Generally, a side-by-side comparison with known genuine seals will quickly identify the phonies.

## Porcelain Motorcycle Plates

From their inception in 1913, New Mexico motorcycle license plates were in a vertical format and this style was retained for the porcelain plates, which at 10" x 3.5" were slightly larger than their predecessors. Rather than being flat, though, they were curved, taking on the character of a piece of a motorcycle fender. The idea, of course, was that they would fit snugly like a glove on the rear fender of the motorcycle.

The problem was that the fenders of every different make of motorcycle had a different width and a different degree of curvature, so it is likely that the plates didn't fit really well on any motorcycle, much less all of them. Nonetheless, the design had a distinct advantage in that while the main body of the plate was exposed, all four edges and all four corners were curved down fairly close to the fender on which the plate was mounted. There were no exposed edges to snag the rider's leg when it was thrown over the rear wheel to mount the machine, a constant irritation with a flat plate mounted on a curved fender.

As with the passenger plates, registration data for porcelain cycle plates is somewhat wanting. The principal documents we have to work with are the *New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1920* showing 161 motorcycles registered as of May 15, 1920; the mid-year *New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1923* showing 146 registered bikes as of July 1, 1923; and the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads statistical chart [*Engineering News-Record* May 25, 1922] which reports that there were 152 total motorcycle registrations for 1921.

The motorcycle section of the 1923 *Motor Vehicle Register* does not have separate listings for new registrations vs. renewals. There is only one section, which is titled "List of 1923 Motorcycle Renewals." It gives only the plate numbers, and does *not* include the serial numbers of the seals like the passenger section does. (This, incidentally, is a hint that the seal numbers may have matched the plate numbers even for renewals.)

It turns out, though, that this list actually does contain both the renewals and the new registrations. The numbers of each can be inferred from the plate numbers, which, like passenger plates, started with #1 in 1920. Working one's way through the 1923 listing, it is seen that there are numerous gaps in the sequence where plates have not been renewed in the past. The last missing number is 385, and the sequence is then continuous from 386 to the end (451).

We can make a reasonable assumption that the plates from about 386 to 451 (i.e., 66 of them) are new registrations, and therefore the last plate number issued in 1922 was 385. There were 80 plates listed prior to #386 which had been re-registered, making a total of 146 active motorcycle registrations (i.e., 66 + 80) as of July 1, 1923.

If we extrapolate the 66 new registrations for the first half-year, through to the end of the year, we can add, say, another 40 (accounting for the end-of-year slowdown) to come up with an estimate of **106 new registrations for the full 1923 calendar year**, and adding the 40 to the 146 active registrations at mid-year gives us **186 total active registrations for 1923**.

This compares to 152 total for 1921 [*Engineering News-Record*, May 25, 1922], 178 in 1924, and 163 for 1926 [*New Mexico Motorcycle Registrations, 1924* and *New Mexico Motorcycle Registrations, 1926*]. New motorcycle sales during this time period were relatively flat (as opposed to car sales, which were skyrocketing), which tells us that the 1921, 1924, and 1926 cycle registration figures are a reasonable cross-check.

Finally, adding the estimated additional 40 second-half new registrations to the 451 plates issued by mid-year gives us an estimate that a **grand total of about 491 porcelain motorcycle plates** had been issued before they were discontinued at the end of 1923.

This does not constitute a lot of plates, and in fact there are only three known survivors. These are:

- # 84 In the hands of a private party non-collector in New Mexico. Issued early in 1920 to L.O. Rister of Maxwell for a 1918 Indian Powerplus 61 cu. in. twin. [*New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1920*] The plate was not renewed in 1923, so it does not appear in the 1923 registrations records.
- # 347 At one time this plate was attached to an antique motorcycle in the collection of the late Bud Ekins of Sherman Oaks, California. Bud was a prominent motorcycle racer in the 1950s and '60s, a motorcycle dealer (Triumphs), and a stunt double for Steve McQueen in *The Great Escape*. I have a color photo of the plate on the antique motorcycle, but before Bud's death, the story goes, the bike was sold to a collector in England and the plate went with it. There the trail goes cold. Interestingly, the plate was registered to a 1913 Flying Merkel motorcycle, which the registration records show was first registered in 1916, and apparently was registered continuously through at least 1924. (Coincidentally, I have the 1924 plate for this same motorcycle in my own collection!) Because of that continuity, one would expect the porcelain plate to be a natural 1920, but #347 is most likely a natural 1922. This could mean that the machine went a couple of years without being registered, or that the owner had to replace the plate for some reason or another (e.g., because it was lost or damaged).

# 394 This appears to be a late 1922 or early 1923 issue, but does not have its original seal with it. The plate is in my collection, and came off of a 1920 Indian motorcycle out of Albuquerque.

In the absence of additional registration records, there is not a whole lot more that we can say with certainty about the distribution of motorcycle registrations during the porcelain years. Motorcycles had become quite popular shortly after the turn of the 20th century because they were the least expensive form of motorized transportation available. But by 1913 Henry Ford had introduced the moving assembly line for his Model T, along with the economy of scale that it brought about. Within a few short years a basic car could be bought for less than a motorcycle, and motorcycle sales plummeted.

With 364 registrations, 1916 was probably New Mexico's peak year for motorcycles [New Mexico Motorcycle Registrations, 1916]. As we have seen, the number had dropped to less than half of that by 1921, then appears to have remained relatively stable through 1926. The best estimates we can come up with for plate numbers are given in the following table, pending the discovery of additional registration data:

**Motorcycle Porcelain Base Plates Issued  
(Roughly Estimated)**

	<b>Newly Issued</b>	<b>Total to Date</b>	<b>First Plate #</b>	<b>Last Plate #</b>
<b>1920</b>	165	165	1	165
<b>1921</b>	110	275	166	275
<b>1922</b>	110	385	276	385
<b>1923</b>	106	491	386	491

## **Renewal Seals for Porcelain Motorcycle Plates**

There are no positively verified surviving renewal seals for porcelain motorcycle plates. A complete set of seals, 1921-1923, accompanies the plate #84 (described above). The owner says that the plate belonged to his grandfather, and that the seals were used on that plate. The seals, however, look no different than those used on car plates. One would expect that their serial numbers *might* be preceded by the letter "M," but they are not. In addition, the serial numbers appear to be machine stamped/embossed, rather than hand stamped. The latter method would seem more likely for the small number issued, especially considering that the seals for both Highway Department and dealer plates are hand stamped. The only thing favoring the contention that these are motorcycle seals is

that all three seals have astonishingly low serial numbers: 1921, #172; 1922, #19; 1923, #8. It would be remarkable to find three seals with such low numbers, and especially so to find them all in one place, but it would also not be surprising to one day find verified motorcycle seals with hand-stamped serial numbers.

## **Porcelain Highway Department Plates**

The New Mexico State Highway Department was the first state agency to receive its own unique license plates. The oldest of these are from the porcelain era and are known to exist with a 1923 seal (tab), and with no seal at all. The porcelain base plates themselves are not dated, and none have ever been found with a 1921 or 1922 seal. The serial numbers on the 1923 seals match the plate numbers of the respective plates.

These circumstances leave open the question as to exactly when the porcelain Highway Department plates started. Did they start in 1923, or is it just that no one has yet turned up any with the earlier seals?

In the case of porcelain passenger plates, a matching serial number on a seal means that the plate is a “natural” for that year, i.e., that it was initially issued in the year given on the seal. If that rule applied to Highway Department porcelains, then all of the ones with 1923 seals have to have been issued in 1923 and could not have been issued earlier. But we really don’t know if the passenger plate rule applied to the HD plates or not.

It turns out that some of the answers are to be found in the *New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1920*, published May 15, 1920, and the *New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1923*, published July 1, 1923. (These books were in all probability followed by supplements, but to date none of those supplements have been found.) The latter publication is divided into four principal sections:

- (a) Newly-issued passenger car plates for 1923, which includes trucks, as there was not yet a separate plate type for the latter.
- (b) Renewals of passenger plates which had been originally issued in 1920, 1921, and 1922. Again, these include trucks.
- (c) Motorcycle plates, both new issues and renewals.
- (d) Dealer plates, both new issues and renewals.

There is no Highway Department section in either the 1920 or 1923 book, but the 1920 book and the Renewals section (for cars/trucks) of the 1923 book



answer many of our questions. First of all, they show several blocks of “civilian” license plates which had been issued to the Highway Department during 1920-1922, and then renewed by the Department for 1923. Most of these are for trucks, with most of those trucks being Nash Quads. Not all numbers within the blocks are renewed, some vehicles probably having been disposed of between 1920 and the beginning of 1923. The principal blocks of these plate numbers were:

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>3 – 149</b>       | Issued at the very beginning of 1920. A total of 59 plates in this group of 147 were renewed for 1923. |
| <b>3150 – 3231</b>   | Also issued very early in 1920. A total of 25 plates in this group of 75 were renewed for 1923.        |
| <b>22238 – 22276</b> | Issued at the very beginning of 1921, with 8 plates renewed for 1923 out of this group of 39.          |
| <b>29430 – 29438</b> | Issued early in 1922, with 6 plates out of 9 renewed for 1923.   |

Also seen are some miscellaneous other individual Highway Department vehicles registered here and there during the years 1920, 1921 and 1922. Out of something on the order of 275 original registrations during these years we see roughly 100 of them being renewed in 1923, indicating a high mortality rate for road construction vehicles.

As far as can be determined, there were no blocks of Highway Department vehicles newly registered in the first half of 1923. Only a few individual vehicles are seen to have been registered during the six months covered by the *1923 Motor Vehicle Register*. The last of these was #44921, and though the specific registration dates aren’t recorded, one can infer from the plate number that this registration took place in the second half of June 1923.

What we see is that “civilian” porcelain plates were still being issued to Highway Department vehicles right up through June 1923. This, combined with the fact that the July 1 edition of the *Motor Vehicle Register* for 1923 does not yet have a Highway Department section, is prima facie evidence that the special Highway Department porcelains were not issued for any year prior to 1923, and, furthermore, were issued only in the latter half of 1923.

There is also evidence to suggest that the new 1923 Motor Vehicle Law was instrumental in prompting the introduction of the unique Highway Department license plates. Portions of the law dealing with trucks became effective July 1, 1923, and for the first time distinct (“tin”) truck plates were issued beginning at this time. (More details on this are to be found in the chapters on “Commercial Car” and “Commercial Truck.”) Perhaps the Highway

Department, in a desire to avoid having to deal with multiple types of plates, requested that the special plates be introduced for the department.

Collectors, no doubt, will consider it a cruel twist of fate that the most desirable porcelain plates, from #3 to #149, were issued to the Highway Department. There they ended up getting whacked around on the tail ends of highway construction trucks, with only one known survivor out of the batch.

(The two lowest numbered plates escaped this fate. Louis C. Ilfeld, the same guy who snared plate #1 back in 1912, managed to hang on to the number through the intervening years and he got porcelain plate #1. Plate #2 went to W.J. McInnes, a banker in the Roswell area, and resides in my collection.)

Incidentally, porcelain expert Eric Taylor reports that New Mexico is the only state for which Highway Department porcelains were issued.

## **Varieties of New Mexico Porcelain Highway Department Plates**

There are two minor varieties of New Mexico porcelain Highway Department plates:

**Type 1.** “HWY” stacked over “DEPT” on the left side, followed by the plate number, then the date seal near the right end of the plate. Dimensions are 4.5" x 14.5". Has brass-grommetted round mounting holes at all four corners, plus two 1¼" elongated mounting slots at the top of the plate. Numbered from 1 to perhaps as high as 200.

**Type 2.** Same as type 1, but has elongated mounting slots at both the top and the bottom of the plate, for a total of four, each measuring 1¾" long. Plate numbers approximately 200 to 300. It is quite possible that since these plates were ordered in a small quantity (see below), not to be repeated, the manufacturer simply used some existing blanks that were already on hand, not all of which exactly matched.

## **Number of Porcelain Highway Department Plates**

Eric Taylor reports that the highest number known for these plates is a little over 300. The registration records indicate that upwards of 275 Highway Dept. vehicles had been registered with “civilian” porcelain plates during 1920-1922 (though not all were renewed in '23), but only a handful between January 1 and July 1, 1923. Even if there were to be a significant purchase of new vehicles

in the latter half of 1923, and even if those *and* all of the existing vehicles were to be re-plated after July 1, a purchase of 300 plates would easily be sufficient for the purpose.

This information further establishes the certainty that the Highway Department Porcelains were introduced in 1923. The known facts also support the conclusion that these plates were introduced beginning on or after July 1, 1923, and that they were installed on all existing HD vehicles, as well as any new ones that were purchased in the last half of the year. This seems to be true in spite of the fact that the state would be reverting to standard tin plates in the coming year, and had already begun issuing tin plates to commercial cars and trucks as of July 1, 1923.

## **Renewal Seals for Highway Department Porcelains**

There are only a few known surviving Highway Department porcelain plates, and even fewer with surviving seals. As explained earlier, these plates were all issued in 1923, so the only type of seal that exists for them is the star-shaped 1923 seal. The serial numbers on the surviving seals match the plate numbers, and the seal numbers are clearly hand-stamped, as the numerals are neither in line nor evenly stamped as they would be if machine-made. This is in contrast to the passenger plate seals which are all neatly machine-stamped or embossed, depending upon the year. Also, there is no letter prefix on Highway Department seals as there is on Dealer plate seals.

## **Porcelain Dealer Plates**

Dealer plates issued during the porcelain period were intended to be displayed much the same as had been the case since the type's inception in 1913. By this time, though, the governing law was the 1919 motor vehicle law, which became effective on January 1, 1920, the same day as porcelain plates were first required to be displayed.

The 1913 and 1915 motor vehicle laws both required that the name of the dealer or his company be on the dealer plate, along with the word "DEALER." The 1919 law itself was silent on this requirement, but the repeal clause of the 1919 law revoked only those "parts of [prior] laws in conflict with the provisions of" the 1919 law. Consequently, the requirement for the dealer's name and the word "DEALER" to be on the plate was still in force during the porcelain era.

At 5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" and significantly larger than automobile plates of the same type, porcelain dealer plates were introduced in 1920 with a design that would accommodate the legislation's mandate. Across the top of the plate, in large

letters, are the words “DEALERS LICENSE.” The lower left quadrant of the plate is occupied first by the license number, followed by a small “N.M.” stacked over the “1920” date. The date is surrounded by three small rivet holes for mounting the date seals for subsequent years.

The entire lower right quadrant of the plate is left blank to allow for the dealer to post his name, or that of his business, in this otherwise unused part of the plate. Ironically, though, not a single one of these porcelain dealer plates has ever been found with a name occupying that area. Admittedly, though, anything written or painted on porcelain could easily have come off within a few years.

## **Varieties of New Mexico Porcelain Dealer Plates**

As is the case with passenger porcelains, the dealer porcelains exist both with and without the “1920” date baked into the porcelain base plate. Oddly though, there seems to be no rhyme or reason as to which ones have it and which ones don’t. Low numbers— #2 and #24 being known examples—do not have the 1920 date. Another relatively low numbered example, #40, does have the 1920 date. Then later ones again do not. In any case, the undated examples far outnumber the dated ones.

Another minor variation is that while most of the known dealer porcelains have the three tab mounting holes directly below the “N.M.”, some of the high numbered plates have these rivet holes offset about two inches to the right.

## **Seals for Dealer Porcelains**

Pitifully few surviving original seals are known for dealer porcelains, but they do exist for all three years: 1921 (diamond), 1922 (octagon), and 1923 (star). The seal serial numbers are unevenly hand-stamped in the same fashion as they are on the Highway Department seals, but have an added unique feature in that they bear a letter “D” prefix.

As near as can be ascertained from the few known examples, the seal serial numbers *could have* followed the same numbering pattern as do passenger seals. If so, those which are new registrations (i.e., “naturals”) have numbers which match the plate number and those which were renewed after an earlier year registration do not match. This possibility is conjecture based on anecdotal observations, however, and is not a certainty as some of the observed seals may well have been switched from other plates. Of course since the serial numbers on dealer seals were hand-stamped, it is most likely—and it would be entirely logical—that a matching-number seal was given *every* year that a porcelain dealer plate was renewed, as well as in its year of initial issue.

## Number of Porcelain Dealer Plates

The *New Mexico Motor Vehicle Register 1923* indicates that by July 1, 1923, a total of 261 porcelain era dealer licenses had been issued, not all of which had been renewed into 1923. In fact, only 136—barely more than half—are shown as active at the middle of 1923. There are essentially no missing license numbers in the list after number 218. In other words, there are roughly 40 contiguous numbers from 219 to 261, which leads to the conclusion that most of these 40 were likely 1923 issues. If one extrapolates through the second half of the year, we might surmise that, at the very most, there were probably no more than another 40 dealer's licenses issued between July 1 and December 31, 1923. The highest license number issued, therefore, was probably no higher than 300. Indeed, the highest known number for porcelain dealer plates is 280.

Potentially throwing these calculations entirely out of kilter is dealer license plate #261. This number is the very last dealer license listed in the *Motor Vehicle Register 1923*, which was current to July 1, 1923. Common sense tells us that it had to be a new issue in 1923, and, for that matter, was most likely issued in May or June of 1923. But the dealer plate bearing this number, originally issued to Womack Swatz Motor Co. of Clovis, not only survives today, but has an original matching 1922 dealer tab #D261 on it! Not 1923, but **1922**! Moreover, 1922 dealer tab #D264 also survives (albeit without the matching plate). The tab is well worn and shows clear signs that it had been mounted on a plate.

The revelations of numbers D261 and D264 indicate that, contrary to what we first surmised, none of the dealer's licenses listed in the *Motor Vehicle Register 1923* were originally issued in 1923. They would have been issued in 1922 and earlier, and renewed in 1923. While the passenger car registrations are contained in two separate sections of the book—new registrations and renewals—there is only one section for dealer licenses. Since there are no missing numbered pages in the book, we are inclined now to say that the newly registered 1923 dealer licenses were simply omitted from the book, though whether intentionally or by accident, we don't know. Nonetheless, the estimate of 300 as a grand total for porcelain era dealer licenses remains unchanged.

## Sorting Out the Dealer Porcelains

As we have seen, there are questions about porcelain dealer plates which to this point have not been fully answered, but some of the remaining uncertainties can be resolved by examining the available evidence in greater depth.

First of all, we related a little earlier that 300 dealer licenses were issued during the years 1920 through 1923. But it's important to keep in mind that this refers to *licenses*, **not** license *plates*. The 1919 motor vehicle law which governed licensing during the porcelain era stipulated that each dealer was to pay a fee of \$25.00 for his dealer license and he would receive one dealer plate with that license. If the dealer needed additional plates, these could be purchased for \$5.00 each, up to a maximum of five additional tags. In other words, it was possible for a dealership to have as many as six dealer license plates. If every dealer had that many, then there would have been upwards of 1,800 porcelain dealer tags distributed in New Mexico, but the real number is probably closer to something like 500-700.

We also observed that as is the case with passenger porcelains, dealer porcelains exist both with and without the blue "1920" date baked into the porcelain base plate. An important difference, however, is that even low numbered dealer plates (e.g., dealer plate #2) exist without the "1920," something that is not true for the passenger porcelains (excepting the rare replacement plate). Deepening the confusion is the fact that it is the great majority of surviving porcelain dealer plates which do *not* have the blue "1920" in the porcelain. It turns out, though, that accounting for the seemingly disproportionate number of the undated dealer plates and their apparently random distribution is easier than one might initially think.

Evidence from both preceding and succeeding years indicates that a dealer's *license* number and his license *plate* number were always the same, meaning that a dealer who ordered extra plates during the porcelain era could have had more than one plate with the same number. Although no two surviving porcelain dealer tags are known with the same serial number, it seems certain that they must have existed, and such examples may yet be found. As we shall see, there could conceivably be matched pairs of plates with both of them having the porcelain "1920" date, one with the "1920" and one without, and both without the date, not to mention similar combinations of three to six plates all having the same serial number.

There is not enough information in the few available registration records, or to be found among the few surviving porcelain dealer plates to be absolutely certain, but the most likely scenario of how the dealer tags were distributed appears to be this:

The Secretary of State would have had no way to know ahead of time which dealers would request extra plates, or what license number would end up being assigned to any particular dealer. He therefore, sometime in 1919, would have made an estimate of the number of dealers who would apply for 1920

licenses. He then would have ordered that number of single plates bearing the “1920” date in the porcelain. These plates would have been issued in numerical order as the dealer applications were received, mostly in late 1919 from existing dealers, but also throughout 1920 as new dealerships were established.

As requests for *extra* plates were received from dealers, in conjunction with both initial applications in 1919, and others received sporadically throughout 1920, the extras would have been special ordered from the factory in California, to be made bearing the same license number already assigned to the dealers requesting them. There’s no way to know for sure, but it seems highly probable that the earliest of these ordered, and perhaps even all of them ordered throughout 1920, would have had the baked-in “1920” date.

All dealers who were newly licensed in the years 1921-1923 almost certainly received an undated first plate with an appropriately dated validation seal on it. All extra plates ordered in these years for both existing and new dealers likewise would have been undated (but with dated validation seals)—even those ordered for dealers originally licensed in 1920. These two facts alone account for the undated base plates greatly outnumbering the 1920-dated ones, and for some low-numbered plates not having the blue “1920” date.

Finally, let’s take a further look at dealer seals. It was pointed out earlier that it’s logical that the serial numbers on seals for dealer porcelains would match the numbers on the plates they were assigned to, and that this would be the case for all three years seals were used. This seems especially true since the seals for all years had hand-stamped serials. Occasionally, though, dealer porcelains are seen bearing seals with very high serial numbers. That these are tabs which have been switched from passenger porcelains is immediately apparent from the fact that the seals are machine stamped (or embossed), do not have the “D” prefix, have serials which do not match the plate number and have serials far higher than the number of dealerships that have ever existed in the state.

## **The Demise of New Mexico Porcelains**

New Mexico’s planned 5-year experiment with porcelain license plates was cut short at the end of 1923, the plates having proved to be unsatisfactory in the eyes of the Secretary of State, the Comptroller, and the peace officers tasked with enforcing the motor vehicle law. Anyone familiar with the sorry condition in which most New Mexico porcelains are found might conclude that so many of them had become so unreadable as to necessitate a new issue, but such was not the case.

The problem boiled down to the annual revalidation seals which, it turned out, were difficult for police officers to verify except at very close range. On top of that they were easy to steal, and were easy to move from one car to another. As early as 1920 Secretary of State Manuel Martinez had expressed his dissatisfaction with the seal system and recommended a return to annually-issued tin plates. He strongly reiterated this recommendation in 1922, but still no change was made and the problems continued to mount. [Report of the Secretary of State Manuel Martinez ... Seventh and Eighth Fiscal Years, 1919-1920, p. 18 (FY 1919 and FY 1920), and Report of the Secretary of State Manuel Martinez ... Ninth and Tenth Fiscal Years, 1921-1922, p. 5 (FY 1921 and FY 1922), also reported by the Santa Fe New Mexican, December 29, 1922, p.5, c.1]

Meanwhile, as provided for by a recent act of the New Mexico state legislature, the function of motor vehicle licensing was transferred from the Secretary of State's office to the State Comptroller's office effective April 16, 1923. R.H. Carter was the Comptroller at the time of this transition.

When Carter assumed the responsibility he found that a logjam of 7,000 applications for registrations and renewals had piled up at the Secretary of State's office and these were dropped in his lap along with the new job. The backlog represented 7,000 law-abiding citizens who had sent in their applications and payments before the January 1 deadline, but whose licenses still had not been issued. Quite a number of motorists, through no failure of their own, were running around with expired license plates. [Santa Fe New Mexican, April 27, 1923, p.5 c.2]

Consequently, in an open letter sent to the sheriffs of the state and published in the newspapers, the Comptroller explained that the vehicle owners were not at fault, and asked the sheriffs to hold off on enforcement until after May 5, 1923. The Comptroller's office was hiring extra staff, said Carter, and he would notify law enforcement officers when the backlog had been cleared out. [Santa Fe New Mexican, April 27, 1923, p.5 c.2]

The new office was soon caught up, only to find that certain other motorists weren't being nearly as civic minded as those who had already paid. By June, Carter was already exasperated with the degree of contempt New Mexicans were showing for the licensing law. "Probably 35 to 40 percent of the owners of motor vehicles in New Mexico," he said, "have made no attempt to secure 1923 licenses or seal numbers." His reaction was to send a telegram to all sheriffs and peace officers of the state, directing them to investigate every motor vehicle, and "In every case where effort to secure proper license seal is not found, please make arrest and file formal complaint in proper court." [Rio Grande Farmer, Las Cruces, June 14, 1923, p.10, c.3]

The threat of arrest was widely published in newspapers throughout the state, but apparently to little avail. On July 6 Carter asked Governor Hinkle to intervene, which he did. The governor sent his own letter, addressed "To the



Sheriffs, Constables, and other Police Officers of New Mexico: Gentlemen: ... regarding the enforcement of the auto license tax on motor vehicles. ... It is your official duty, under the police regulation and the law of the state, to rigidly enforce this law.” [Deming Headlight, July 20, 1923, p.1, c.4]

Just one month later it was reported that theft of the license plate seals had grown to “become an infant industry.” The thefts were causing considerable grief to automobile owners, and the “wholesale dodging of [license] fees,” was causing the loss of thousands of dollars in revenue to the state. Accordingly, Mr. Carter announced that the porcelain plates and their seals would be abandoned at the end of the year, and that “In 1924 two plates will be issued for every auto, one to be carried on the front and the other on the rear.” [Santa Fe New Mexican, August 22, 1923, p.5, c.3]

And so ended not only the era of porcelain license plates, but also the practice initiated in 1912 of issuing only a single plate to each vehicle.

## **ADDENDA**

A passenger porcelain with serial 13499 has been found which does *not* have the blue 1920 date in the porcelain, but does have the rivet holes for renewal seals. All porcelains up through about serial 22500 *should* have the 1920 date. The two most likely possibilities to explain this are (1) it was a manufacturing error, or (2) it was a one-off, made-to-order plate manufactured as a replacement for a lost or damaged tag of the same serial number. If the latter, it might well have been manufactured *after* 1920, i.e., in 1921 or later. Since it does not fall neatly into either the Type 1 or Type 2 categories, we propose a new category of Type 1A for this plate and any similar ones which might be found in the future.

Significantly, another Type 1A surfaced at an ALPCA regional meet at Albuquerque in early 2015, hinting that more of these will be found now that they have been recognized.

**Registration Data for Selected Porcelain Plates  
Illustrated in this Chapter  
and on our companion website at  
NMplates.com/Porcelains.htm**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Plate #</u>	<u>Registered To</u>
<b>Passenger (includes Trucks)</b>		
1920	2	W.J. McInnes, Roswell, 1917 Dodge touring.
1920	6585	J.H. Lewis, Orange, 1917 Ford touring.
1920	13499	Robert Guess, Steins, 1918 Ford touring. Later registered to W.P. Hill of Lordsburg in 1923.
1921	310	E.G. Minton, 310 W. Alameda, Roswell, 1919 Buick touring.
1921	15383	Edwin H. Leupold, Belen, 1918 Ford roadster.
1921	22636	Frank Bohn, Portales, 1915 Ford roadster.
1922	5340	Van W. Lane, Estancia, Buick touring (year model not given).
<b>Motorcycle</b>		
1920	84	L. O. Rister, Maxwell, 1918 Indian Powerplus 61 cu. in. twin.
<b>Dealer</b>		
1920	2	Jones & Lindley, Clovis.
1920	40	May Buick Co., Tucumcari.
1922	261	Womack Swatz Motor Co., Clovis.
1923	24	Santa Fe Motor Co., Santa Fe.

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/Porcelains.htm>

# Pre-states

Pre-state license plates are defined as those plates which were either (a) issued by, or mandated for use by a state, county or municipality prior to the Territory of New Mexico becoming a state, or (b) issued by, or mandated for use by a county or municipality after statehood, but before the state government itself began issuing or mandating the use of license plates. New Mexico achieved statehood on January 6, 1912, and began issuing license plates on August 16, 1912 [*Automobile License Record 1912-1914*]. These, therefore, are important dates in considering New Mexico pre-state license plates.

Over the years a story has circulated in books, in newspapers, and even in ALPCA magazines, to the effect that the New Mexico Territorial government passed a law in 1905 requiring the registration of motor vehicles. Supposedly, such registration resulted in a numbered receipt being issued to the vehicle owner, whose responsibility it was to then display that number on the vehicle. Some versions of the story say that in compliance with the law, New Mexico motorists made their own license plates, typically out of leather or metal, and that they displayed the registration number followed by the initials “N.M.” Pre-state license plates would have indeed come about as a result of such a law—if only the story were true.

In the decades leading up to statehood, the New Mexico Territorial Legislature met only in odd-numbered years, and at the end of each session a book containing the full text of all Acts passed into law was published. An exhaustive study was made of these books, which included all of the following (the wording of the title varies slightly for some sessions):

*1899 Acts of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of New Mexico, 33rd Session*

*1901 Acts of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of New Mexico, 34th Session*

*1903 Acts of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of New Mexico, 35th Session*

*1905 Acts of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of New Mexico, 36th Session*

*1907 Acts of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of New Mexico, 37th Session*

*1909 Acts of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of New Mexico, 38th Session*

1911 – Due to the transition from Territorial to State Government, no legislative session was held in 1911. [*First Report of the State Engineer*, December 1, 1914, page 9; and other sources.]

*1912 Laws of New Mexico, Passed at the First Regular Session of the Legislature of the State of New Mexico.*

Besides the aforementioned hard copies, the 1905 Laws can also be found on-line at Google Books.

Additionally, extensive searches were made by experts at the New Mexico State Supreme Court Law Library, the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, the New Mexico State Library, the University of New Mexico Law Library, the New Mexico State University Library Special Collections and Government Documents stacks, and the New Mexico Motor Vehicle Division.

Not only was there no 1905 law, but there is no mention of anything even remotely related to motor vehicles in *any* of the Territorial laws. Furthermore, the first *State* motor vehicle law (i.e., Chapter 28 of the 1912 state laws) has no repeal clause to repeal or modify any prior law—prima facie evidence in itself that there was no prior law.

Consequently, the tale of a Territorial law is found to have been a myth which came to grow and become embellished with each recitation over the years. The only mystery remaining is how life was breathed into the story in the first place. Perhaps in the telling of the history of some other state, the name of that other state got transmuted to that of the New Mexico Territory. In all probability, though, we will never know the answer.

So, does this mean that hopes of finding a New Mexico pre-state license plate are dashed? No, not at all. There is excellent documentation showing that at least four New Mexico municipalities not only required registration of motor vehicles, but required that license plates be displayed prior to statehood. Details on these are given below, but see also the chapter on “Issuing Authorities.”

### **Albuquerque Municipal Plates**

Albuquerque’s 1910 Municipal Ordinance 432 required licensing of motor vehicles operated within the City of Albuquerque. A license fee in the amount of \$2.00 was paid to the City Clerk for registration of automobiles and motorcycles, who in turn issued a permanent license number. The number was required to be displayed upon, or attached to, the rear of cars or the rear of the seat of motorcycles. Since the ordinance said nothing about the issuance of actual license plates by the City Clerk, it can be inferred that the owner was required to make his own license plate, or arrange for someone to make it for him.

The ordinance does state that the registration number was to be displayed in “plain, legible figures, three inches in height” for automobiles, and “one inch in height” for motorcycles. In contrast to the requirements in Santa Fe, Raton, and Las Vegas (see below), there is no mention of prefix or suffix letter or letters.

The later first-year state registration figures show 137 automobiles registered in Albuquerque for the year 1912, and 57 motorcycles in 1913 [*Automobile License Record 1912-1914*, which included motorcycles]. Since the state didn’t prohibit redundant city licensing until March of 1913 [*Laws of 1913*, Chapter 19, Sec. 8], the initial state numbers are probably a fairly accurate reflection of the total number of licenses issued by the city of Albuquerque during the pre-state period.

These numbers, however, do not account for the fact that the ordinance had no exemption for visitors. Technically, persons from neighboring towns who came to shop—and even tourists who were just passing through—would be required to cough up the fee and get a license. This being the case, the aforementioned numbers would be higher.

As Albuquerque was the county seat of Bernalillo County, it is probably reasonable to suppose that just about every motor vehicle in the county would have traveled to Albuquerque on occasion. Hence, if we look at the 1912 state registration figures for the entire county we can approximate an upper limit as to how many licenses in total might have been issued under these circumstances.

It turns out, though, that the vast majority of the motor vehicles in the county were concentrated in the city proper. The numbers for automobiles are: city alone 137, county total 137. For motorcycles: city 57, county 59.

The paucity of vehicles, combined with the fact that the specified license numerals were significantly smaller than those on the later state-issued plates, hint at overall license plate dimensions somewhat smaller than those of the later state-issued plates. Of course, if the license numbers were started at something higher than “1” (say, 100 or 1000), there might be less of a difference in size. In some cases the numbers would have been painted directly on the vehicle, so there would not have been as many license plates as there were registrations, but the possibility exists that some of the plates have survived.

## **Las Vegas Municipal Plates**

Automobile licensing ordinance No. 349 became effective in Las Vegas upon its publication in the newspaper August 13, 1910 [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, August 13, 1910 (the pages were not numbered in this issue)]. The ordinance was similar to those passed in

other New Mexico cities the same year, and its principal requirement was for the display of a single license plate, to be supplied by City Clerk Charles Tamme, after payment of an annual five dollar licensing fee. Motorcycles were required to be licensed as well as automobiles.

A few days later the paper related that Mr. Tamme was considering various models of license plates, but “The one most favored is of white enameled metal on which dark letters and numbers can be attached.” Although the ordinance itself makes no mention of it, the newspaper article reported that the tags would “bear the letters ‘L.V.’ followed by the number of the license.” [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, August 17, 1910, last page, c.3] If one of these plates is ever found, there’s a good chance that this is what it will look like.

Interestingly, the owner was given the option of mounting the city-supplied tag on his car, or having the number “painted thereon at expense of the owner, if it is unpracticable to attach the tag.” This leaves open the possibility that some of the city-issued tags were not used, and might survive to this day in pristine condition.

Even though the ordinance was effective on August 13, the City Clerk did not yet have the license plates ready to issue. Thus, an announcement was made on August 26 that “Enforcement of the newly adopted automobile and motor cycle ordinance will begin on September 1. After the passage of the ordinance is required considerable time to purchase numbers for the machines and the blank licenses. Many of the auto owners have been inquiring when their license money was due. It is predicted by City Clerk Charles Tamme that he will be ready to begin issuing the licenses the first of the month.” [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, August 26, 1910]

But little over a month after the ordinance went into effect, it was reported that “Many of the automobiles seen on the streets are not bearing license tags in accordance with the ordinance passed several weeks ago. Some of the cars are licensed, as the names of their owners appear on the city's books....” [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, September 28, 1910, p.8, c.4]. As would be seen in coming years, New Mexico would have a troubled history of getting its motor car owners to register their vehicles and display license plates.

In 1910 Las Vegas consisted of two separate but adjacent towns, Las Vegas and East Las Vegas, which, if taken together, made it the second largest town in the state with a combined population of 6,934 [1910 U.S. Census], or about 63% of that of Albuquerque. It is unclear whether the ordinance applied to both towns, but the initial state registrations (1912 for automobiles and 1913 for motorcycles) recorded 59 cars and four motorcycles in total for the two towns combined. For the reasons mentioned earlier, the Las Vegas municipal

registration totals are probably similar, offering hope that some might yet be found today.

The ordinance had a 30-day exemption for visitors, which likely would have allowed tourists to escape having to buy a license, but it would have been unavoidable for anyone who came from out of town regularly to shop or conduct business in Las Vegas, which was the county seat of San Miguel County. But as in the case of Albuquerque, we again find the vehicles concentrated in the city, with these figures: Automobiles, city alone 59, county total 61. Motorcycles, city 4, county total 4.

### **Santa Fe Municipal Plates**

With Santa Fe Mayor Arthur Seligman as Chair, the Santa Fe City Council met on November 1, 1910, and at that session enacted a motor vehicle licensing ordinance which was subsequently designated as Santa Fe Municipal Ordinance, Section 279. [“Minutes of Santa Fe City Council Meeting, November 1, 1910.” Seligman went on to become Governor two decades later, in 1931.] The new law set forth the requirement that motor vehicles operated within the corporate limits of the City of Santa Fe be licensed not later than ten days later, i.e., by November 11, 1910. A fee of \$8.00 (\$4.00 for motorcycles) was to be paid to the City Clerk, whereupon the Clerk would issue a license bearing a number.

It was then the duty of the vehicle's owner “to cause to be placed, at his own expense, upon his car ... the corresponding number of such license with ‘S.F.’” The numerals were to be “at least three inches high,” and had to be placed on both the front and the rear of the vehicle. Clearly, these plates would have also been homemade, differing in appearance from one to the next, but all would have borne the registration number, followed (or perhaps preceded) by the letters “S.F.”

Although the aforementioned minutes of the November 1, 1910, City Council meeting are in the Santa Fe City Clerk’s files to this day, there seem to be no surviving registration records that resulted from the ordinance. State registration figures beginning in 1912 show 41 automobiles in Santa Fe and 13 motorcycles during the first registration year, implying similar numbers for Santa Fe municipal plates. Again, the vehicles are almost all found inside the city: Automobiles, city alone 41, county total 44. Motorcycle, city 13, county 13.

The Santa Fe ordinance had a 10-day exemption for visitors, which would have exempted most tourists from having to buy a license, but anyone who came

from out of town regularly to shop or conduct business in the state capital (also the county seat of Santa Fe County) would have had to pony up the fee and get a license.

### **Raton Municipal Plates**

An article in the December 1934 issue of *New Mexico Magazine*, p. 15, relates a story by Raton resident W.A. “Chip” Chapman that he was the holder of New Mexico’s first license plate. Chapman’s picture, along with photos of the license plate and one of his registration certificates, accompany the story. His claim was that Raton was the first local New Mexico jurisdiction to license automobiles, that he got the first license, and therefore he had the first N.M. license plate.

The plate, which Chapman says he made himself by hand, is a leather plate (actually, patent leather, according to the article) with aluminum numerals. The pictured registration receipt shows that the governing ordinance was No. 169, and that the license number was No. “100 R.” The same number (including the “R”) appears on the pictured license plate.

The *Raton Daily Range* for February 1, 1911, reported that this ordinance had been passed the previous evening, i.e., January 31, and publication of the ordinance took place in the February 1 and February 2 editions of the *Daily Range*. The ordinance states that it was to become effective “five days after its passage and publication,” which would have made it effective on February 7, 1911. Although inexplicably left blank in the published ordinance, the ordinance number is seen on Chapman’s receipt to be No. 169.

Not only does the 1911 Raton ordinance postdate the Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Las Vegas ordinances of 1910, but the Raton ordinance is a virtually verbatim clone of the one from Albuquerque, with very, very few words changed at all. There is no question but that the Raton City Council took the existing Albuquerque ordinance and simply changed the name of the town to “Raton” and replaced the original Section numbering system with its own Section numbers.

Consequently, there would have been numerous Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Las Vegas pre-state plates in use long before Raton even passed its ordinance. But even though Chapman’s claim to have had the first license plate in New Mexico is found to be bogus, he did indeed have a N.M. pre-state license plate, the sight of which would cause any New Mexico collector to salivate.



Chapman says that he made the plate himself, and that claim is entirely plausible. If so, each such homemade license plate was probably somewhat different in appearance from the next, but all would have borne the registration number, followed by the letter “R.” Based on the then-high license fee of \$4.50, there is also the possibility that the plate may in fact have been supplied by the city along with the license (registration) certificate, in which case all issued plates might be quite similar in appearance. In 2013 another Raton plate, 122R, was found, which is similar, but not exactly the same as Chapman’s. Then in 2015 a third Raton plate, 109R, surfaced. It is identical to Chapman’s 100R plate, clearly having been made by the same person. Chapman could have made both plates, but we think it more likely that both were made by a third party, either locally or out of state. (All three of the aforementioned plates were found in Raton, incidentally.)

Another point noted is that the Raton ordinance does not itself stipulate the use of the letter “R” on the license plate, but merely states that the City Clerk shall issue the numbers. This seems to leave no question but that it was left to the City Clerk to come up with the numbering scheme, and in fact the registration receipt issued by the City Clerk that is illustrated in the 1934 article clearly shows the number as “100 R.”

Incidentally, while the license plate illustrated in the Chapman article may well have been his first tag, the receipt itself states that it is “for the year ending May 16th, 1913,” meaning that it had been paid on or about May 16, 1912. At best, then, the receipt would have been for a renewal that was initiated more than a year after the effective date of the Raton ordinance.

New Mexico’s first-year state registrations recorded 30 automobiles and 16 motorcycles in Raton. As explained earlier, the state allowed municipal registrations to continue into 1913, so Raton should have had roughly these same numbers for its own city registrations.

Being essentially an exact copy of the 1910 Albuquerque ordinance, Raton also had no exemption for non-residents who might visit the town occasionally, or might just be passing through. It appears that most of these persons would have been sooner or later caught up in the licensing requirement and forced to get a license. As Raton was the county seat of Colfax County, and the center of a large coal mining district, this could have significantly increased the license numbers over those vehicles which were actually resident within the city.

And indeed, Raton is the one exception among the four pre-state licensing cities that had significant numbers of motor vehicles outside the county seat itself, with the state’s first registration numbers being: Automobiles, city alone 30, county total 66. Motorcycles, city 16, county 34. So there is a reasonable chance that Raton’s municipal license total could have been closer to that found in the county at large.

## **Where is Chip Chapman's Plate Today?**

Eva Mae Sproule was Raton's longest serving City Clerk, holding the office without interruption for more than four decades, from May 1958 until her retirement in March 1999. A few months after she died in December 2011 at the age of 84, some of her effects were donated to the Raton Museum. There, in a large envelope, was Chapman's license plate, along with the registration card that had been pictured in the 1934 magazine article.

After having been missing for almost 80 years, Chapman's plate proved to be far more handsome than one would have guessed from the grainy 1934 magazine illustration. A color photo of this recovered treasure appears at the end of this chapter, as well as on the NMplates.com website, and the plate itself now resides in the Raton Museum.

## **Pre-State Statistics**

For decades New Mexico collectors (I among them) have bantered around statistics associated with the mythic "1905 law." Those numbers said that 80 vehicles were registered in 1905, a number which had reached 640 by 1911, the year before statehood. Well, if there was no 1905 law, where did those numbers come from?

It turns out that the numbers were not just made up, but they were not registration figures, either. The numbers are simply estimates of motor vehicle numbers prepared by the Office of Public Roads (OPR), and published in tabular form by the Public Roads Administration (PRA) in 1945. The OPR and PRA were predecessors to today's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the OPR estimates can be found today, buried deep within FHWA's archives.

Despite obvious and provable errors that can be found elsewhere within the OPR statistics, my sense is that the agency's 1900-1911 estimates for New Mexico are quite reasonable. The increase in automobiles followed a more or less geometric progression during that decade, and the OPR estimate of 80 cars in 1905, and 640 cars (plus 20 trucks) for the state in 1911, fits well with the known number of 904 automobiles actually registered in 1912. And those early numbers were certainly enough to have triggered the pre-state licensing ordinances in the several largest cities, and more than enough to nurture hope that a few of those pre-state municipal plates still exist today, and are out there just waiting to be found.

## The End of Municipal Plates

When the state of New Mexico enacted its first automobile licensing law in 1912, the legislation included a provision which permitted cities which licensed autos on a municipal basis to continue to do so, but only for residents of their own cities. That authority was canceled the following year by the 1913 motor vehicle law [*Laws of 1913*, Chapter 19, Sec. 8, approved March 11, 1913, effective March 15, 1913], which prohibited local governments from requiring an additional license. Consequently, the various municipal pre-state plates could have remained in use until the effective date of the new law, i.e., until March 15, 1913. The 1913 law did permit those cities to record the state license number, and permitted them to charge a recording fee for this, “not to exceed 50 cents per annum.”

## The #744 NM Plate

Pictured at the top left corner of page 94 of the June 1987 *ALPCA Newsletter* is a handmade black-on-white flat metal plate bearing the number 744, followed by the stacked letters “NM.” The accompanying caption purports the plate to be a New Mexico pre-state, and that on the back of the plate, written in pencil, is the notation “W.D. Newton, Las Cruces, N.M.”

We know, however, that there were no Territorial pre-states, leaving only municipal pre-states to consider. We have found no evidence whatsoever that Las Cruces ever had any kind of automobile licensing law, but there remains the slight possibility that the plate could have actually been from another New Mexico city.

A problem with it being a municipal pre-state, however, is that there were only 904 automobiles registered in all of New Mexico by the end of 1912, and just 131 cars in the largest city, Albuquerque. The number of cars in the Territory was far less than that during the years leading up to statehood, making the number 744 far too high for any city, unless the numbering started at 700, which itself is highly improbable.

Additionally, Las Vegas, Santa Fe, and Raton can be eliminated, because their licensing requirements stipulated the letters “L.V.,” “S.F.,” and “R.,” respectively, be on the plates, not “NM.” The Albuquerque municipal ordinance doesn’t say anything about letters, but it (of which the Raton ordinance is a clone) leaves it to the City Clerk to issue the numbers. Why would Albuquerque—or any city, for that matter—want to introduce confusion by requiring “NM” instead of the city’s initial(s)? After all, these were municipal ordinances that applied only within the limits of the city, and not anywhere else in the state.

The answer to all of this is found in New Mexico's 1923 motor vehicle registration records. 744 was the number of the 1920 porcelain plate registered to W.D. Newton's 1916 Stearns Knight roadster, a plate which he renewed for the third time at the very beginning of 1923. With this renewal he received the 1923 star-shaped seal (tab) bearing serial number 59, and his address is indeed shown as Las Cruces. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1923*] Yet another link in the chain of evidence is the fact that the person in whose collection the #744 plate resides also has the 1923 tab #59. It was obtained from the same person, and at the same time that the #744 plate itself was obtained several decades ago.

Further substantiation is found in the 1922 Doña Ana County records, where all automobiles in the county were recorded for property tax assessment purposes. There we find an entry for Willis D. Newton of Las Cruces, showing that he owned a 1916 Stearns Knight bearing 1922 New Mexico license plate #744. [*Doña Ana County Records, Automobil[e] Record for 1922.*] In other words, this record documents the 1922 renewal of Newton's 1920 porcelain plate #744.

Newton did not hold plate #744 for any other year for which records are available, either before or after the four porcelain years. We can therefore say with certainty that the hand-painted metal plate #744 was a homemade replica of Newton's 1920-1923 porcelain plate. He may have simply lost the original, or perhaps the porcelain plate got badly crunched up so as to be unreadable, and this plate, if not a replacement, was a supplement hanging next to the original to tell you what the original used to say. In 1923 a genuine replacement plate (an honest-to-goodness, brand new porcelain) was available from Santa Fe for just \$1.00. But a dollar was a lot of money in 1923, and a local sign maker could probably have provided the replica for 15¢ or less. (Remember, it only cost the state 26¢ each to have the porcelains themselves made in the first place).

Yet another possibility is that since the 1920 plates were singles, Newton may have had reason to display the license number on the front, as well as the rear of his car, and he could have had a sign painter prepare a replica plate for this purpose. Indeed, ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner points out that neighboring Texas, only 45 miles away, was a two-plate state. Having the extra plate on the front would have eliminated the inconvenience of having to answer to unknowing Texas authorities as to why his front plate was "missing." And, in fact, contemporary news dispatches mentioned Mr. Newton making trips to El Paso in connection with his automobile sales business.

## **Newton's #14 Plate**

The same June 1987 ALPCA article which featured Newton's #744 plate included a photo of a dealer plate, #14, belonging to Newton. Though not explicitly stated as such in the caption, the implication was that this was also a pre-state plate. In fact, it is not. It is a state-issued 1915 dealer tag, which is fully documented in the state's 1915 motor vehicle registration records for that year. Please see the "Dealer" chapter for much more information on this and other early New Mexico dealer plates.

## **The White's City Museum Plate**

A few miles outside the entrance to Carlsbad Caverns National Park is a small settlement called White's City, named for Jim White, who discovered the famous cave in 1898. For decades the privately owned Million Dollar Museum was operated in White's City for the benefit of tourists going to and from the caverns.

From the standpoint of the license plate collector, the museum's most interesting artifact was a homemade license plate that looked for all the world like what we would expect a Territorial pre-state plate to look like. I first saw the plate sometime in the late 1960s, and thought it looked reasonably authentic, but I failed to take a photo of it. The last time I visited, around 1998 and with camera in hand, the plate was nowhere to be seen and the attendant on duty knew nothing about it. As if to seal the mystery forever, the museum was sold and its entire contents auctioned off in July 2008, an event which I didn't learn of until a few years after the fact. We now know that it could not have been a Territorial pre-state, but it would have been nice to learn exactly what it really was.

## **Who made the pre-states?**

Of the known municipal pre-state issues, only the Santa Fe ordinance is explicit in that it was the duty of the vehicle's owner "to cause to be placed, at his own expense, upon his car ... the corresponding number of such license..." The Las Vegas ordinance made it clear that the City Clerk would be issuing the plates, though the owner had the option of painting the number on his machine "if it is unpracticable to attach the tag."

The other two city ordinances are ambiguous at best. As mentioned above, even though Mr. Chapman said he made his own plate—and he may well have done so—there is also some evidence to suggest that the Raton plates might

have been provided by the city. If that was the case, the city could have hired somebody locally to make them, or they could have had their own city shops construct the plates, or they could have been “kit” plates similar to those said to have been favored for the Las Vegas plates. We’re even less certain about Albuquerque.

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter’s text.

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# Registration Certificate Holders

For a brief period New Mexico required that automobile owners display their registration certificates in a special holder provided by the state. This came about during the 1929 legislative session, and was codified in the *Laws of 1929*, Chapter 121, § 5½ [*sic*].

“Whenever a vehicle is first registered hereunder the department shall issue a suitable container with the certificate of registration issued for such vehicle, which container shall be so designed that the registration card may only be removed by mutilating or destroying the same.” [The “department,” of course, was the Motor Vehicle Department.] “Every owner upon receipt of a registration card shall place the same in the container furnished and shall securely fasten the same in plain sight within the driver’s compartment of the vehicle for which said certificate is issued.” (Motorcycles and trailers were allowed to carry the container in a toolbox or similar receptacle attached to the vehicle.)

A registration holder with a built-in self-destruct mechanism! What a concept! Not only were such holders issued, but a number of them survive today. Interestingly, all of the known survivors are dated 1932, and most of these are unissued, still in their original mailing envelopes. Each holder bears a unique serial number which also appears on the mailing envelope. And as far as is known, this is the only year that they were issued.

One would think that with the law having been passed in 1929, the certificate holders would have been introduced in 1930, but because of funding issues, that didn’t happen. Gilberto Mirabal, the Comptroller at the time, said that a vendor had come to his office in 1930 and offered to sell 60,000 of them to the state for 10 cents each, or a total price of \$6,000. The problem was, his department didn’t have the money. “I either had to violate the 1929 law requiring issuance of such containers, or violate the Bateman Act requiring all officials to operate within their [budget].” Mirabal chose to ignore the motor vehicle law.

But by the end of 1931 the new Comptroller, J.M. Lujan, had managed to purchase the holders by using proceeds from the sale of license plates, rather than from the “six percent” operating kitty that normally funded the department. Unfortunately, he ended up having to pay not ten cents, but 28½ cents each. The purchase price, combined with postage to mail them, was going to run \$35,000 for the year.

With the news of that, a stink arose when former Comptroller Mirabal publicly criticized not only the means of funding, but the now-higher (almost tripled) price. [All details from *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, January 19, 1932, p.2, c.1]

The immediate result of the dust-up was that distribution was delayed and countless crates of the “gadgets,” as they were called, remained stored in the basement of the State Capitol building. By mid-year a change of leadership had

taken place at the Comptroller's office, and the new man, Juan N. Vigil wanted the gizmos out of the basement. On June 9 he announced that distribution of the certificate holders to the branch motor vehicle bureaus around the state had begun. [Clovis Evening News-Journal, June 9, 1932, p.5, c.7] These, of course, were the ones bearing the 1932 date.

These little containers are of steel construction, very sturdily made, and measure about  $3\frac{5}{8}$ " x  $4\frac{5}{8}$ " x  $\frac{3}{8}$ " thick. They have a glass window through which the certificate can be seen, and a sliding tray in which the certificate can be inserted from the end. Inside is a small backward-pointing metal spike which can be seen through the glass. You put the certificate in the tray and slide it in. But if you if you try to slide it back out, the spike rips the certificate apart.

The 1932 holder will accommodate a certificate measuring up to  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " x 4", and in fact, that is the exact size of New Mexico automobile, truck and motorcycle registration certificates and titles throughout the 1930s. The 1932 certificates themselves state that the owner is to sign the certificate and place it in the container (holder).

Of course, only the registration certificate would have been placed in the container, not the title. The holders had been mandated by the legislature in an effort to reduce auto theft in New Mexico, with the ultimate goal of bringing down auto insurance rates. Alas, the effort was in vain, as insurance rates instead actually went higher in 1932. [Las Vegas Daily Optic, May 2, 1932, p.1 c.8]

As mentioned earlier, these holders are known only with a 1932 date. Whether they were issued only in 1932, or these same ones continued to be issued the following year(s) until the supply was exhausted is unknown. But it does appear that the requirement for their use, as set forth in the 1929 Law, was later repealed, though registration certificates for a number of subsequent years continued to carry the admonition to "place certificate in container."

The registration certificate holders, derisively referred to in the press as "gadgets," played a part in an alleged kickback scandal involving State Comptroller Lujan, who ended up resigning his position. [Santa Fe New Mexican, May 2, 1932, p.1, c.6 and Roswell Daily Record, June 2, 1932, p.1, c.1] See the chapter on "Manufacturers" for more details.

## Photographs for this Chapter

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# Salesman

During its first decade the state of New Mexico treated salesmen and other out-of-state commercial operators essentially the same as tourists. For a certain period, a salesman was free to remain in the state without worrying about licensing his vehicle. Upon the expiration of that period (which varied from 30 days to six months, according to the law in force at the particular time) he had to buy a standard resident license plate.

The 1923 Laws eliminated the grace period for vehicles in commercial use, declaring that “the non-resident ... owner[s] of every passenger automobile, motor truck, or trailer carrying passengers, freight, express or articles for hire, or operated as a commercial truck or commercial car within this State or between points without and points within this State, shall be required to apply for registration and pay the registration fees, and to secure and constantly display the plates specified in this Act for vehicles and trailers of like class and capacity.”

In some instances a traveling salesman might not fit neatly into that description which included buses, taxis, commercial heavy-haulers and the like. He might, for instance, be traveling in his car for no other purpose than to get himself to some location where he would be making a sales presentation. Ultimately it was seen that salesmen warranted a separate category of their own.

In February 1932 it was announced that out-of-state salesmen operating in New Mexico would have to buy Guest license plates. These were the same plates that were being sold to tourists for a dollar apiece, and salesmen would get them for the same price. But instead of the six months that tourists were allowed in the state, salesmen would be given only thirty days. After the month was up, the salesman could buy another Guest plate (for another dollar), and could do this a maximum of four times. After that he had to buy a standard resident license plate. [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, February 24, 1932, p.5, c.3] (The Guest plates, as a unique type, were manufactured and used only in 1932.)

The sequence of events for salesmen after 1932 has not been completely documented, but by 1935 a law was in place that specifically mandated a five-dollar annual license fee for out-of-state salesmen operating in New Mexico. The law put it this way:

“... salesmen, agents or representatives with no permanent place of business in this state and who are traveling through the State for the purpose of calling on retailers, wholesalers or jobbers for the purpose of taking orders for future delivery, shall be required to register any motor vehicle used by them in such business and pay therefor a registration fee of Five (\$5.00) Dollars, for which an appropriate license ta[g] shall be furnished by the motor vehicle commissioner.” [*1935 Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 56, Section 1 (c), effective February 1, 1935]

As can be imagined, the fee generated a considerable number of complaints by those who were targeted by it. [*Albuquerque Journal*, October 10, 1935, p.8, c.2]

Although the law said that “... an appropriate license ta[g] shall be furnished ...,” all evidence is that standard passenger car plates were used for this purpose during 1935 and 1936, and it may be that specific blocks of plate numbers were issued to salesmen to help distinguish them from resident motorists, but as yet we have been unable to find references to establish the reservation of such blocks. This circumstance may have come about because the 1935 law contained a typographical error which caused the operative clause to say “... an appropriate license **tax** shall be furnished ...” [emphasis mine]. This was corrected in 1937 when a revision to the law stated that “... an appropriate license *tag* shall be furnished ...” [italics are in the original] such that there were now clear grounds to issue a distinctive plate. [*Laws of 1937*, Chapter 120]

It seems plausible that this was the reason that the first true Salesman license plates were issued in 1937. They carried an “S” prefix, which was introduced specifically to keep the identity of Salesman plates clear in case the car was sold in the state. (From 1912 to 1978 New Mexico license plates went with the car when it was sold.) The fee for the Salesman plates was still \$5, considerably cheaper than the annual fee for a resident license plate, and the state didn’t want to take a chance on losing a few bucks if a non-resident salesman should decide to sell his car while in the state. [*Albuquerque Journal*, July 28, 1937, p.3, c.5]

By mid-1937 the state had sold 3,000 sets of S-prefix plates to out-of-state salesmen, raking in \$15,000 for the state’s coffers. [*Albuquerque Journal*, July 28, 1937, p.3, c.5] The state’s politicians may have been happy about the revenue, but getting a plate with an “S” on it didn’t make the salesmen happy. The griping was widespread and loud, tarnishing the image of the state as being receptive to visitors.

Barely a year later, even the Democratic candidate for governor, John Miles, as part of his campaign platform, was calling for repeal of the Salesman license plate law. [*Clovis News-Journal*, October 27, 1938, p.10, c.1] Miles won the election that year and took office early in 1939. [*New Mexico Blue Book, 1989-1990*]

The new governor worked quickly to keep his promise, and by early March the legislation lifting the five-dollar fee for non-resident salesmen had been passed and was on his desk for signature. [*Albuquerque Journal*, March 6, 1939, p.8, c.2] The bill was signed into law, and because it also had an emergency clause it became effective immediately, i.e., on March 11, 1939. The provision was worded as follows:

“ ... salesmen, agents or representatives with no permanent place of business in this state and who are traveling through the State for the purpose of calling on retailers, wholesalers or jobbers for the purpose of taking orders for future delivery, and non-resident agents or representatives traveling into the state

for the sole purpose of supervising, or consulting with, the local agents or representatives of the business concern by whom they are employed, *shall not be required to register any motor vehicle used by them exclusively in such business nor pay therefor a registration fee when regularly licensed in any other state for the current calendar year.*” [Italics are in the Law.] [1939 Laws of New Mexico, Chapter 117, Section 1 (d)]

That this occurred so early in the year—combined with the fact that Miles had made his intention known more than four months earlier while he was campaigning in the fall of 1938—meant that relatively few of the several thousand 1939 plates on hand were sold. And as collectors of New Mexico plates know, unissued, pristine 1939 Salesman plates in their original envelopes have survived to this day in such vast numbers that they are sometimes difficult to even *give* away!

Out-of-state commercial motor vehicles were still required to obtain New Mexico license plates immediately upon commencing operation within the state, as this law did not lift the licensing requirement for them, nor did it provide for a grace period.

But that was not the end of the story for the Salesman license plates themselves. Just two weeks earlier, on February 24, a piece of legislation was enacted which resulted in a major change in the way school buses were licensed, and this change necessitated special license plates for them. It appears that many of the leftover 1939 S-prefix Salesman plates were repackaged and re-branded as S-prefix school bus plates! More details on this reincarnation will be found in the chapter on “School Bus” plates.

Thus, Salesman plates exist only for 1937, 1938, and 1939. School Bus plates exist for 1939 and most later years. The two types of plates issued during the year of overlap, i.e., 1939, are essentially impossible to tell apart unless you have the original envelope that the plates came in, on which the name of the type is printed, along with the plate serial number. Unfortunately, it is reported that some of these envelopes carry only the serial number, with no mention of the type of plate.

## Photographs for this Chapter

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## Examples of Home Addresses of Holders of Salesman Plates

As will be seen from the examples listed below, the holders of Salesman plates were predominately from surrounding states, but included a significant number from more distant locales. There are also a small number registered with New Mexico addresses, the reason for which is unknown, as only out-of-state salesmen were required to buy these plates. Any given city is listed only once. For example, though there were many, many salesmen whose home addresses were in places like Denver, El Paso, and Amarillo, we include each such city only once in the list below.

AZ, Casa Grande	KS, Liberal	TX, Amarillo
AZ, Maricopa	KS, Sabetha	TX, Austin
AZ, Peoria	KS, Wichita	TX, Barstow
AZ, Phoenix	KY, Henderson	TX, Big Springs
AZ, Safford	LA, Shreveport	TX, Borger
AZ, Tucson	MD, Baltimore	TX, Brownfield
AZ, Winslow	MI, Detroit	TX, Canyon
CA, La Habra	MI, Grand Rapids	TX, Childress
CA, Long Beach	MN, Albert Lea	TX, Dalhart
CA, Los Angeles	MN, Faribault	TX, Dallas
CA, Maywood	MN, Minneapolis	TX, El Paso
CA, Oakland	MN, Red Wing	TX, Farwell
CA, Ontario	MO, Kansas City	TX, Ft. Stockton
CA, Pacific Grove	MO, Montgomery City	TX, Ft. Worth
CA, Pasadena	MO, St. Louis	TX, Hedley
CA, San Francisco	NE, Grand Island	TX, Houston
CA, San Gabriel	NE, Lincoln	TX, Kermit
CA, San Marina	NE, Oxford	TX, Kosse
CA, Santa Ana	NJ, Rutherford	TX, Laredo
CA, South Pasadena	NM, Albuquerque	TX, Lefors
CA, Sunset Beach	NM, Artesia	TX, Leveland
CO, Alamosa	NM, Clovis	TX, Longview
CO, Boulder	NM, Gallup	TX, Lubbock
CO, Canon City	NM, Hobbs	TX, McCamey
CO, Colorado Springs	NM, Las Cruces	TX, Midland
CO, Denver	NY, Buffalo	TX, Monahans
CO, Durango	NY, Corning	TX, Odessa
CO, Florence	NY, East Rockaway	TX, Pecos
CO, Grand Junction	NY, New York	TX, Plainview
CO, Manitou Springs	NY, North Tonawanda	TX, San Angelo
CO, McPhee	OH, Cincinnati	TX, San Antonio
CO, Monte Vista	OH, Columbus	TX, Shamrock
CO, Pueblo	OH, Dayton	TX, Slaton
CO, Sedalia	OK, Bartlesville	TX, Stamford
CO, Tercio	OK, Clinton	TX, Sunray
CO, Trinidad	OK, Elk City	TX, Throckmorton
CT, New Britain	OK, Enid	TX, Waco
GA, Americus	OK, Norman	TX, Wichita Falls
IL, Chicago	OK, Oklahoma City	TX, Wink
IL, Peoria	OK, Tulsa	TX, Kermit
IL, Rushville	OK, Woodward	UT, Salt Lake City
KS, Hugoton	OK, Yale	WI, Milwaukee
KS, Hutchison	OR, Portland	
KS, Kansas City	TX, Abilene	

# Samples

Sample license plates are pretty easy to understand. In most cases they were made to look exactly like passenger car plates, except that they all bear the number zero, or variations thereof, such as 000, 00000, etc. One of the principal uses of samples was by law enforcement agencies across the country who made wall displays consisting of a sample plate from every state. Officers could study the displays from time to time, thereby familiarizing themselves with the appearance of out-of-state license plates.

But there were other uses as well. Movie studios often ordered samples to enable them to fabricate reproduction license plates which made for more realistic scenes where automobiles were involved. [Company correspondence, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Beverly Hills, California, to Commissioner, Motor Vehicle Dept., Santa Fe, New Mexico, January 26, 1946 and October 1, 1953] And, of course, to a more limited extent they were sought after by collectors.

Samples appeared in New Mexico at least as early as 1924, and in that year had a 00-000 format, a layout that was repeated through 1931, in some years with the hyphen, and without it in others. 1932 was somewhat of an anomaly in that sample plates were given the number 90-000.

Beginning with 1934, and lasting into the 1940s samples displayed a triple zero with a double Zia which made a particularly attractive plate: \*000\*

Once county number prefixes were introduced in 1947, samples typically (but not always) had a zero in the county position, followed by the Zia, followed by four or five zeroes, e.g.: 0\*00000.

After stickers were introduced in 1962, the stickers on sample plates usually had a serial number of all zeroes as well, but were sometimes overprinted "SAMPLE" or "VOID."

Upon the initiation of the three-letter, three-number format, passenger samples were given a similar arrangement; AZA-000, for example, was a sample issued in 1972. As the 1970s progressed, samples were introduced for a number of vehicle types other than passenger cars, including trucks, trailers, vanity plates, freight trailers, motorcycles and motorcycle vanity plates, to mention just a few.

In the early years, samples were not made in large numbers. Only 200 samples were ordered for 1931, for instance. [Clovis Evening News-Journal, August 4, 1930, p.5, c.4] In recent years samples have been made as undated plates with no stickers (SAM\*PLE and TOUR\*NM being examples), and have been produced in numbers large enough to meet all demand.

## Photographs for this Chapter

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# School Bus

Until early in the twentieth century the United States was largely a rural society and its educational system developed accordingly. The legions of one-room school houses that sprang up as the nation grew served America well, but the educational environment was measurably better at larger schools where pupils could be grouped by grade, with a teacher dedicated to each educational level.

With the motor car revolution came the concept of consolidated school districts, where students from a wide area could be transported to centralized schools, and the benefits they provided. The movement became particularly strong in the 1920s and 1930s, during which time school buses were introduced in large numbers.

In New Mexico, school buses fell into two distinct categories: those owned by local governmental units, and those owned by private bus companies contracted to provide transportation services to and from the schools. Buses owned by county and municipal administrations received their license plates free. Prior to about 1929, these would have been “civilian” license plates (as there was no other type), and from 1929 onward would have been “Official” license plates.

The bus contractors, on the other hand, were required to purchase their license plates at a steep fee. Initially these plates would have had no distinct markings, but beginning in mid-1923 commercial plates were introduced, and by the 1930s the familiar “C” prefix commercial plates with a “BUS” tab in the lower right corner became the standard issue for all commercially operated buses. School buses were not classified differently from any other commercial operators, and had to pay full price for these plates.

Early in 1939 newly-elected Democratic Governor John E. Miles pushed for a bill that would reduce the license fees and provide “relief [for] the school bus owners who operate under contracts obtained by competitive bidding.” State Senator Perry Sears of Capitan drafted such a bill and pushed it through the legislature. Governor Miles signed the bill on February 24, 1939, whereupon it became Chapter 20 of the *1939 Laws of New Mexico*. Because the law bore an emergency clause it was effective immediately. [*Clovis News-Journal*, February 26, 1939, p.1, c.7]

This new license category necessitated a special license plate to distinguish it from full-price commercial bus plates, and a plate with an “S” prefix would be logical for a School Bus. But the law had become effective immediately upon signature by Governor Miles and time was short.

Barely two weeks later Miles signed into law another piece of legislation he had been advocating even before his election the previous fall—the abolition of the five-dollar-per-year license fee for out-of-state salesmen. [*Albuquerque Journal*, March 6, 1939, p.8, c.2] This freed up hundreds (perhaps thousands) of as-yet-unissued “S” prefix Salesman plates that were then repackaged in envelopes labeled “School Bus.” (The abolishment of the Salesman license plates was enacted through Chapter 117, Section 1 (d) of the 1939 Laws.)

Consequently, the 1939 “S” prefix plates were used for both Salesman and School Bus that year, and even though the overlap was only a couple of weeks or so at most, they are essentially impossible to tell apart unless you have the plate’s original mailing envelope, on which is stated both the type of plate and the plate’s serial number. Unfortunately, it is reported that some of these envelopes carry only the serial number, with no mention of the type of plate.

1947 School Bus plates are known to exist in two distinct formats, i.e., with and without a “county number” prefix to the left of the Zia symbol. Since 1947 was the first year for the use of county prefixes on passenger car and truck plates, it’s logical to assume that these prefixes are what they appear to be. However, the fact that the plates exist without the prefixes, and that only a handful of different “county numbers” have been observed on the plates that do have the prefixes, raises the question as to whether these prefixes might have an altogether different meaning which is yet to be learned.

School Bus plates continued in the S-prefix format for many years, not ending until 1975, when the prefix was changed to “SB” (for School Bus, of course), then again in about 1992 when an additional letter was added after the “SB” to accommodate an ever-increasing number of buses.

Ironically, the much more plentiful modern school bus plates are often more difficult to obtain than earlier ones, in part because they are now reused year after year with renewal stickers. Further complicating the search is that most school buses are now operated by large companies under contract to school districts, and these companies in general seem not receptive to parting with plates that are no longer in use.

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# Staff Officer

During the 1930s and 1940s New Mexico's governor had the authority to bestow the title of "honorary colonel" on whomever he wished. These "colonels" were deemed to have been appointed to the Governor's staff, but as far as can be told from contemporary news reports, they had no duties. Likely, it was nothing more than a titular perk in return for some kind of political favor, but one thing that the title did buy the holder was the right to be issued a Staff Officer license plate in lieu of a regular one.

The governor could appoint anyone he wanted as one of these "Staff Officers," and in fact some of the appointees lived out of state. Governor John Dempsey even appointed at least one infant [*Albuquerque Journal*, January 9, 1946, p.1 c.3], and the *Automobile License Record 1931* shows one of the plates for that year as being registered to a Santa Fe loan company. It would appear that the governor's authority permitted him to appoint persons at lower ranks than colonel, as the 1931 records show not only "colonels," but a lieutenant and a couple of captains as well.

The earliest known Staff Officer plates are the 1929 issues, and their introduction is probably loosely related to the introduction of Official plates that same year. The registration book for 1931 indicates that 99 of the 1931 Staff Officer plates were manufactured, numbered from X-1 to X-99. However, only 15 of the 99 had been issued by the time the publication was released, and these would have been for appointments made by Gov. Arthur Seligman. Getting one of these assured the holder of a prestigious low-numbered plate.

Later governors cast about these honorary titles much more freely. A total of 400 Staff Officer plates were manufactured for 1945. Of these, 342 were issued, with the highest number issued being 381 (some reserved plates went unclaimed). [*Albuquerque Journal*, January 9, 1946, p.1, c.3]

During 1940, at least, Staff Officer plates cost the same as regular plates [*Albuquerque Journal*, October 30, 1940, p.9, c.1], and that was probably the case for other years as well.

In the papers of Governor Clyde Tingley (1935-1938) are letters from a number of people requesting appointments as honorary colonels, and, more importantly, issuance of Staff Officer plates. Correspondence initiated on November 19, 1937 by Charles E. McDuffie in reference to the soon-to-be-issued

1938 plates illustrates how the system worked. McDuffie, a realtor and insurance agent in Albuquerque, typed his request on his business letterhead, as follows:

November 19, 1937

Dear Governor:

As to our conversation today about appointing me Colonel on your staff I appreciate this Governor, but am especially interested in getting the license plate too as I expect to leave here around December 20th for Mexico City to be gone until the middle of February, and I feel it might be of use to me on this trip.

If you can see your way clear to appoint me Colonel and also see that I get a license plate will certainly appreciate it. However, if it is not possible for you to get the license plate with the Colonelship just forget it Governor, and I won't feel any different towards you because of your inability to do so.

Yours very truly,  
(signed)  
Chas. E. McDuffie

Despite McDuffie's impolitic choice of words, penciled in at the top of his letter, in Governor Tingley's handwriting, is the notation "Appoint him a Colonel." A week and a half later official notification was sent by return mail on the Governor's letterhead:

November 30, 1937

Dear Colonel McDuffie:

Your letter of November 19th was duly received.

Under separate [sic] cover I am mailing you your commission as Colonel-Aide-De-Camp on my personal staff.

I shall be glad to file your request for staff officer plates, so that same may be considered when these plates are distributed.

With best wishes, I am

Yours very sincerely,  
(signed, Clyde Tingley)  
Governor

And, indeed, the *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1938* shows that McDuffie received Staff Officer plate #X-31 for that year, registered to his 1937 Buick sedan.

Ultimately, these appointments, and the issuance of these plates, came to be seen as an abuse of the governor's office. When Gov. Thomas Mabry took office in 1947, his newly appointed Motor Vehicle Commissioner, Mike Gallegos, found a supply of 1947 Staff Officer plates on hand, out of which ten already had been issued. Those plates, employees advised Gallegos, had all been issued in one batch to outgoing Governor Dempsey, at a price of \$2 per plate. Where they went from there, the motor vehicle office didn't know. [*Albuquerque Journal*, January 7, 1947, p.4, c.2]

But by then steps had already been taken to make the plates less attractive. The 1947 Staff Officer plates were made as generic, unnumbered tags for that year. "Colonels" would have to buy a regular license plate (1947 was still a one-plate year) and then obtain a separate Staff Officer tag which was the same size and colors as the regular plate, but with no numbers. These plates bore simply the stacked words "STAFF OFFICER" flanked by double Zias with the "47" date in each. Gone was the prestige of having a low-numbered plate.

The honorary commissions expired on December 31 of the last full year the appointing governor was in office [*Albuquerque Journal*, January 7, 1947, p.4, c.2], but more than that was about to expire. Legislation was introduced in January 1947 by State Senator Don L. Dickason to permanently prohibit the use of distinctive titles on numbered plates, but still allow un-numbered auxiliary plates like the 1947 Staff Officer plates which had already been prepared [*Gallup Independent*, January 31, 1947, p.1, c.5]. (The bill was intended to eliminate not just Staff Officer, but other similar types of numbered plates, such as National Guard Officer, which itself had already been eliminated several years earlier.)

The final law as passed became Chapter 15 of the *1947 Laws of New Mexico*. The operative wording was: "Effective as to licenses for the calendar year 1948, the department shall issue no number plates for privately owned vehicles that contain the words 'staff officer' or the like. All licenses for private motor vehicles shall be alike in form except as to the number thereof and provided that the department shall have the discretion to adopt whatever numbering system may be determined by it to be reasonable and desirable." [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, February 7, 1953, p.1, c.3, continued on p.6, c.6]

In December 1947 it became clear that the axe had finally fallen, when the Motor Vehicle Commissioner announced that no special plates had been made for 1948. [*Albuquerque Journal*, December 17, 1947, p.6, c.1] The era had finally come to an end.

Or had it? In 1953 Tony Luna Jr., head of the motor vehicle registration division, said that the Bureau of Revenue legal department (headed by Pat Hamilton) had interpreted the law to apply only to licenses issued for 1948 and therefore the division could legally issue special plates in 1953. And, by golly, the

State Senators and Representatives decided that they were going to get some special plates for themselves. This came about through a grammatical blunder in the 1947 law which says that special plates were prohibited for 1948, but then omitted the necessary additional words “and for all years thereafter.” And in fact, the legislators got their special plates, but that’s another story. (See the chapter on “Manufacturers”). [Santa Fe New Mexican, February 8, 1953, p.16, c.1]

**Note:** Though usually listed in the registration records under a section titled “Staff Officers,” in some years the section was titled “Staff Officials.”

**Registration Data for Selected Staff Officer Plates  
Illustrated in this Chapter  
and on the NMplates.com website at  
NMplates.com/StaffOfficer.htm**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Plate #</u></b>	<b><u>Registered To</u></b>
1933	X-14	Not issued
1937	X27	Walter A. Biddle, Albuquerque, 1936 Ford coupe, 2730 lbs
1938	X27	Walter A. Biddle, Albuquerque, 1936 Ford coupe, 2730 lbs

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# State Police Motorcycle and State Police Passenger

Though the need had been recognized for some time, there was prior to 1933 no statewide constabulary in New Mexico, much less anything resembling a highway patrol. Theoretically, the task of patrolling the highways outside of town limits was the responsibility of the county sheriffs and their deputies, but in reality law enforcement on rural highways was essentially nonexistent.

In an attempt to address this shortcoming, Governor Arthur Seligman urged the State Legislature to authorize the creation of such a force, which would also consolidate personnel with related functions in several departments. [*Message of Governor Arthur Seligman to the Eleventh Legislature of the State of New Mexico, January 11, 1933, pp. 6-7*] The legislature accomplished this through passage of Senate Bill No. 105, approved March 14, 1933, and enacted as Chapter 79 of the *Laws of 1933*. Significantly, the decision was made that this new police agency would be strictly a motorcycle patrol, with no squad cars. The name given to the organization, and codified in this law, was the “New Mexico Motor Patrol.” The law authorized “one chief patrolman and nine patrolmen.”

After a rigorous selection and training process, ten men were commissioned as police officers and operations began on August 5, 1933. These men were then given the daunting task of patrolling the state’s entire highway system—thousands of miles of mostly unpaved roads. For this purpose, they were issued ten brand new, gleaming 1934 model Harley-Davidson 74 cubic inch Big Twin motorcycles, fresh from the factory and with consecutive serial numbers, fully equipped with sirens, lights, and emergency kits.

A key provision of this law was Section 1(c) which said of the officers, “They shall be ex-officio deputies and agents of the officers and departments within the state of New Mexico charged with the registration of motor vehicles and the issuance of licenses therefor.”

Within two months of its start-up, the Motor Patrol was nabbing so many unregistered vehicles that the collection of unpaid registration fees alone was more than paying for the operating expenses of the agency! Nonetheless, even though they found themselves being periodically pinched by their new highway guardians, the motorcycle patrolmen were widely respected and admired by New Mexicans.

Each of the ten Harleys was issued a standard “civilian” 1933 motorcycle license plate which looked no different from any other cycle plate issued that year. Only by looking up the plate numbers in the registration records can you tell which of these were carried on the Motor Patrol bikes. One of the ten plates, registered to the motorcycle with serial number 34VD1396, is in my collection. As near as can be told from historical records, this was the motorcycle assigned to Patrolman Henry Eager. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1933*] These plates, manufactured by the Gopher Stamp & Die Company of St. Paul, Minnesota, were the last ones to be made by a commercial concern.

The following year, 1934, when plates made at the new license plate facility at the State Penitentiary in Santa Fe were distributed, the Motor Patrol again received standard civilian plates. And once again it is necessary to refer to registration records to separate them out from other cycle plates. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1934*]

Another act of the State Legislature, effective February 25, 1935, changed the name of the Motor Patrol to the New Mexico State Police, the name which it retains to this day. [*1935 Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 119] The authorized staffing level was raised to 30 officers by the law as well. There was no change, however, in the way that license plates were issued, and the patrolmen’s bikes continued to receive civilian motorcycle tags through 1937. [*New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1935*, *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1936* and *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1937*]

1938 brought the first purpose-made State Police motorcycle plates, which are listed in the *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1938*. The record shows that 50 of these plates were made, all but seven of which had been issued at the time of publication of the 1938 Directory. Every one of these motorcycles was a Harley, mostly 1937 and 1938 models, but four of the original 1934 model Motor Patrol motorcycles from 1933 were still in service, including the one that carried the 1933 license plate in my collection.

Strangely, the State Police motorcycle plates were undated even though they were issued annually. Fortunately, the colors match passenger car colors for every year, and they can therefore be dated by their colors. These tags are the same 4½" x 8¼" size as civilian cycle plates for the same time period, and have the words “STATE-POLICE” horizontally across the top. The plate serial number is prefixed by “N.M.” followed by a hyphen and either a one- or a two-digit serial number. For as long as this style of plate was in use, the two digits were sufficient for the number of motorcycles assigned to the force and all evidence suggests that the State Police cycle plates were made in this style from 1938 through at least 1947.

There is but a single exception to these plates being undated. The one known surviving 1940 plate has a small “40” professionally hand-painted above the hyphen, between the “N.M.” and the serial number. The color of the “40” perfectly matches the color of the numerals for this year (yellow), which suggests that the date may have been added at the prison when the plates were made. (Which also suggests the irony of cons making license plates for the same officers who put them behind bars in the first place.) If this was in fact the case, the “40” likely will be found on other 1940 NMSP cycle plates that surface in the future.

A potential problem arises in differentiating between the undated plates which were issued in 1941 and 1946. An undiscerning observer would say that because the plates were red on yellow both years, they cannot be told apart. In fact, though, both the yellow and the red were distinctly different shades in those two years. The 1946 has both a lighter yellow and a darker red (almost brownish-red).

An example of each is illustrated later in this chapter and on the NMplates.com website, and though the paint on the '46 is badly deteriorated, note that they are, coincidentally, both the same number, “N.M.-26”. This latter fact establishes conclusively that they are in fact different years.

As previously related, the N.M. Motor Patrol motorcycles were issued civilian license plates for 1933-1935, a policy which continued for State Police motorcycles following the 1935 organizational name change. Only one of the tags in the civilian series—the 1933 Motor Patrol plate mentioned earlier—is known to have survived. Of the 1938 and later tags of the State Police series, examples are known today for 1938, 1940, 1941, 1943, 1946, and 1947. There are at least several each of the 1941 and 1947 issues still around; the others are all one of a kind known to exist.

The organizational history given on the NMSP’s web site states that the first patrol cars were introduced in 1935 with the purchase of seven Chevrolet sedans, but that in 1937 all but three of these were replaced with motorcycles.

Registration records for 1935, 1936 and 1937 show that State police passenger cars received Official plates in all of those years. For 1935 there were nine such Official plates issued to eight Chevrolets and one Buick, which closely matches the information given on the NMSP’s web site. In 1936 the agency received thirteen Official plates. Eight of these were for 1935 Chevrolets, three for 1936 Chevrolets, and one each for a Ford and a Buick.

The 1937 records show fifteen State Police passenger cars receiving Official plates. Four 1937 Chevrolets had been added over the previous year, with the Buick and the Ford having been disposed of, so that the fleet was now made up entirely of Chevrolets.

As in the case for their motorcycle plates, 1938 brought the first purpose-made State Police passenger car plates, which are themselves listed in a dedicated section of the *Automobile License Directory 1938*. By this time, more cars had been acquired, in addition to the three that were said to be remaining in 1937. These were all 1937 and 1938 model Chevrolets, except for one 1938 Buick, making a total of nine patrol cars. Ten of these first-issue 1938 State Police passenger car plates were manufactured, one of which, plate #1, was unissued. [Automobile License Directory 1938]

Period photographs show some State Police patrol cars bearing 1938 Official plates, a fact which is confirmed by the “State Official” plate listings in the *Automobile License Directory 1938*. The changeover to State Police plates occurred sometime after the first of the year, such that both types were in use that one year. The table below shows the assignments of the state Official plates, and the corresponding State Police plates that replaced the Official plates later in the same year:

### 1938 Official plate vs. State Police plate Registrations for Passenger Cars

<u>Official</u>	<u>State Police</u>	<u>Vehicle</u>
301	7	1938 Chevrolet sedan, s/n 1202494
302	5	1937 Chevrolet coach, s/n 1147173
303	8	1937 Chevrolet sedan, s/n 1084332
304	3	1937 Chevrolet sedan, s/n 929410
305	6	1937 Chevrolet sedan, s/n 803453
310		1930 Ford pickup, s/n AA729228
490	2	1938 Buick sedan, s/n 63542665
	4	1938 Chevrolet sedan, s/n 1357759
	9	1938 Chevrolet sedan, s/n 1806505
	10	1938 Chevrolet sedan, s/n 1820514

The last State Police vehicle to receive an Official plate, i.e., #490, was also the first of those vehicles to receive the new State Police plates, #2. (As mentioned earlier, plate #1 was not issued.) A photograph of this vehicle, a 1938 Buick sedan, appears later in this section and on the NMplates.com website.

There is one instance where a prior holder of an official plate was not subsequently assigned a State Police plate. This was Official plate #310, registered to a 1930 Ford pickup truck. The presumption is that this 8-year-old truck was disposed of sometime during the early part of the year, before the State Police plates were made available.



It will also be seen that three vehicles received 1938 State Police plates without having previously been assigned Official plates. Since these are all 1938 model year cars, they were undoubtedly acquired after issuance of the State Police plates had already begun.

In contrast to the State Police motorcycle plates, some of the early State Police passenger car plates were dated, beginning by at least 1941, and they matched civilian passenger car plates in color for all years. The ALPCA archives report them as being dated as far back as 1939, but no photographs are present in the archives so this fact has not been verified. On the other hand, contemporary photographs definitively establish that the 1938 State Police passenger car plates, were *not* dated. The Zias on those plates are blank. The first year for dated plates, therefore, has to fall between 1939 and 1941, inclusive.

Otherwise, the plate layout is essentially the same as civilian car plates, but with the words “STATE POLICE” at the top, and in lieu of the “THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT” slogan for those years in which it was used. Most of the plates through the late 1940s were configured as double Zias, changing to a single Zia by the early 1950s, at which time a switch was also made to a reflective coating.

About 1954, State Police passenger plates became undated, and entered into a series of rather generic designs (although still retaining the words “STATE POLICE”), each of which was used for multiple years.

**Note:** *Branham's Automobile Reference Book*, published annually for many decades, states in its 1943, 1944, 1946 and 1947 editions that the colors of New Mexico State Police plates were “black on white” for those years. Not only is this contrary to all evidence, but surviving original examples of the 1946 and 1947 dated plates are clearly in Passenger colors (which are *not* “black on white”), and there is no reason to believe that metal State Police plates were even made in 1943.

Moreover, the same books state in 1942, 1943 and 1944 that Passenger plate colors were “black on yellow,” and in 1942, 1943, 1944, 1946 and 1947 that Truck plates were “yellow on white,” all of which are demonstrably wrong. In the face of these numerous glaring errors, the only conclusion is that there is no basis in fact for the publication's identification of any of the State Police colors during those same years, either.

To learn more about the NMSP, see *New Mexico State Police* by Ronald Taylor. The book is a definitive pictorial history of the organization, and is available through most national and internet booksellers. Arcadia Publishing, 2013, ISBN 978-1467129992.

As far as is known, New Mexico State Police passenger car plates have always been issued in pairs, even when other vehicles in the state received only single tags. This has been true not only during the years since civilian plates were switched to singles in 1960, but also during World War II (excepting 1943) and the two years immediately thereafter when civilian vehicles temporarily received singles as a conservation measure. The reason for having the pairs is unclear, and though we have not been able to find anything in the law which explicitly authorizes them, neither have we found anything which would preclude the practice.

New Mexico Motor Transportation Police (MTP) vehicles, which have received distinctive plates of their own only in relatively recent years, also receive their tags as pairs. Please see the chapter on “Modern Plates” for more information on this type.

## **2018**

In late 2017 the New Mexico State Police began the process of replacing its existing license plates with all-new tags featuring gold-on-black graphics. The same design is used on both passenger car and motorcycle plates, and includes a representation of the uniformed officers’ shoulder patch. Replacement of the old plates was completed in 2018.

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter’s text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link:

<https://NMplates.com/StatePoliceMotorcycleAndPassenger.htm>

# Taxi

Taxi and Bus plates in New Mexico share a common ancestry with the Commercial Car plate, which itself came into being in 1923, and indeed, little distinction was made between the types prior to 1931. As one reads the respective chapters on these three types the common thread will become apparent.

From the time of the first licensing law in 1912, through mid-1923, commercially operated vehicles in New Mexico were treated and licensed the same as privately owned cars, and received the same license plates. The *1923 Laws*, effective July 1, 1923, made the first distinction with this definition:

***“Commercial Truck or Commercial Car.*** Any motor truck or motor vehicle operated for transporting commodities, articles, or passengers for hire not wholly within the limits of the same city, town or village, or operated by jobbers, merchants, peddlers or others for transporting commodities, merchandise or articles for sale or delivery to customers or branch stores not within the limits of the same city, town or village where the same are loaded.”

From a licensing standpoint, a car that carried passengers for hire—in other words, a taxi—was called a Commercial Car. With that new designation came higher licensing fees and a distinctive license plate. Those taxis which were already licensed, and were therefore already carrying 1923 porcelain license plates, had to be re-registered by the July 1 deadline, at which time they were issued black-on-white embossed steel (aka “tin”) license plates bearing the words “COM CAR.”

(Since the definition said “Any ... motor vehicle ... transporting ... passengers for hire ...,” buses fell within the same Commercial Car designation as taxis, and also received COM CAR plates in 1923. Buses are treated in detail in the chapter titled “Bus.”)

An additional requirement of the 1923 law, Section 5, was that “Upon receipt of ... application and fee the registrar shall issue and deliver to [the] owner ... plates bearing ... the number assigned to such vehicle and in case of a ... commercial car ... a plate showing the weight and carrying capacity thereof.”

This stipulation was the origin of the weight/capacity seals (“tabs”) found on commercial plates of the 1920s and later. The 1923 law set January 1, 1924 as the starting date for plates to display the vehicle’s weight and carrying capacity, and the use of the tabs on at least some plates continued into the early 1950s.

Although there were a few exceptions, almost all commercial cars were taxis (or buses). Their plates from 1923 through 1925 are embossed “COM CAR.” For 1926 through 1929, the plates are embossed simply “COM,” and the “CAR” designation is stamped onto the weight/capacity tab. Colors for 1924 were red on grey [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, November 1923, p. 8; and original example]; 1925 white on black [original example]; 1926 unknown, but possibly the same as known commercial truck, i.e., black on grey; 1927 yellow on black (reverse of passenger) [*Gallup Independent*, July 30, 1926, p.7, c.4]; 1928 blue on gold (reverse of passenger) [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, November 1927, p. 14]; 1929 unknown.

In all cases, the capacities shown on the tabs affixed to Commercial Car plates state the number of passengers the car is rated to carry, which is straightforward enough. But for several decades I had puzzled over a 1928 Commercial plate, #1-854, in my collection which has a CAR tab showing a weight of 3335 lbs, and a capacity of 1½ passengers. What in the world would be a half a passenger? I put that question to ALPCA Archivist, Eric Tanner, who immediately replied that it was probably a 1½ ton Commercial Truck which had been accidentally issued a CAR tab.

This prompted me to look up the license in the *Motor Vehicle Register 1928*, where I found the plate registered not to a car, but to a 1927 Graham truck in Tularosa, weighing 3335 lbs.

Regardless of whatever the person on the street called them, there was no mention of the word “taxi,” “taxicab,” or “bus” in any New Mexico motor vehicle law prior to passage of legislation that became Chapter 119 of the *1929 Laws of New Mexico*. In that law, paragraph 1 introduced two additional definitions to the motor vehicle vocabulary:

“**‘Taxicabs.’** Motor vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, having a normal seating capacity of not more than seven persons.”

“**‘Bus.’** Motor vehicles for the transportation of persons for hire, having a normal seating capacity in excess of seven persons.”

From the standpoint of the motor vehicle department, the only difference between a taxi and a bus was the number of seats it had—its appearance didn’t matter. Because of this, 1930 brought a new type of plate, embossed “BUS” vertically on the right hand side. These Bus plates were in passenger car colors and exist with both “BUS” and “CAR” tabs, the latter known with capacities at least as low as 5 passengers, so every indication is that the “BUS” plate was used for both taxis and buses, but for only this one year. A careful examination of the capacities shown on these tabs should reveal that all of them rated seven or fewer

passengers will be stamped “CAR” (i.e., taxi), and all rated 8 or more passengers will be stamped “BUS.” In fact, however, the capacities shown on the tabs do not always conform to the definition in the law.

1931 was the commencement of the “C” prefix commercial plate series that was to last into the early 1950s, but with the “C” omitted in the first year. The plates themselves are in passenger car colors and have no embossed designation as to type, but the weight/capacity tab was attached with rivets through two small pre-punched holes at the right side of the plate. Here the “TAXI” and “BUS” designations were used on the tab for the first time, along with the usual figures showing vehicle weight and maximum number of passengers carried.

In line with the 1930 tabs described above, all of the 1931 tabs showing a rating of seven or fewer passengers should be stamped “TAXI,” and all rated 8 or more passengers should be stamped “BUS.” Unfortunately, the *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1931* shows only the vehicle weights, and omits the number of passengers, so there is no way to cross check them in this publication.

The 1931 commercial plates were numbered beginning with #1, and were it not for the rivet holes (and tab, when attached) they would be indistinguishable from the passenger plates whose numbers they duplicated. In all probability, this is why the “C” prefix was added the following year.

Registration records for 1931 show that of the approximately 300 commercial vehicles registered, about 200 were taxis, the remainder being buses. [New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1931] This registration book does not show the month of its issue, but it does contain some “Supplement” pages, indicating that it could be as late as the third quarter, or even the end of the year. Numerous unissued tab-less 1931 commercial plates survive today, mostly numbered between 500 and 900, indicating that the actual demand was far less than what the motor vehicle department projected when the plates were ordered in the latter part of 1930. This may well be a symptom of the national economy as the country entered its second year of the Great Depression.

While some of the taxis in 1931 were owned by large companies, with as many as eighteen cars registered, a great many of the taxis were registered to individuals, indicating a number of one-man taxi companies operating all around the state. The larger companies tended to have the kind of cars typically associated with the taxi business—Yellow Coach, White Coach, Cadillac sedan, Paige sedan, Lincoln sedan, and the like—while the little guys had mostly things like Ford, Dodge, Pontiac, and Willys Knight.

1932 saw the introduction of the “C” prefix plates, which clearly distinguished commercial plates from all others. As in 1931, two pre-punched rivet holes were provided at the right side of the plate for attachment of the weight capacity tab, a procedure which continued for the next two decades.

All of the taxis that would have fallen into the “Commercial Car” category during the 1920s now had this simpler style of commercial plate bearing a tab stamped simply “TAXI.”

This method was to continue into the early 1950s, at which time the weight/capacity tabs were finally dropped. In 1955 a new type of plate was introduced for taxis, bearing a “TX” prefix, followed by the Zia, then the plate serial number. [Clovis News-Journal, October 15, 1954, p.2, c.4] During some years these plates were in passenger plate colors, but in others, especially during the 1960s, they were in truck plate colors. By the 1980s this type of tag had died out and the few taxis still operating in New Mexico today carry standard passenger car plates.

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter’s text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/Taxi.htm>

# Trailer

The New Mexico legislature ignored trailers for a long time. Remember that the state's first law in 1912 was an "automobile licensing" law that didn't even pick up motorcycles or trucks. That was corrected in 1913 when a "motor vehicle" law was passed, encompassing just about everything that had wheels and a motor (with exceptions for farm equipment, road construction machinery, and railroads). Still, trailers were not covered—they had wheels, but no motor, so they weren't motor vehicles.

Whether it was a genuine need to regulate them, or simply a desire to create more revenue, the lawmakers finally acted a decade later with passage of the *1923 Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 96 (effective July 1, 1923), entitled, "An Act Relating to Motor Vehicles and Trailers." Their day had finally come, and the law defined them this way:

**"Trailer.** Any vehicle designed for carrying articles or passengers upon its own structure and for being attached to or drawn or propelled by a motor vehicle or tractor, including any vehicle so constructed that a portion of its weight or of its load rests upon the vehicle or tractor by which it is drawn or propelled."

Though the term wasn't used here, the law clearly covers both trailers and semi-trailers. (And, yes, there were in fact passenger trailers in those days.)

An additional requirement of the 1923 law, Section 5, was that "the registrar shall issue and deliver to [the] owner ... plates bearing the name of the State of New Mexico or abbreviation thereof, the number assigned to such vehicle and in case of a motor truck, commercial truck, commercial car mentioned in Section 3 hereof and in case of a trailer, a plate showing the weight and carrying capacity thereof." The implementation of the last requirement would be accomplished by attaching a small metal weight/capacity tab on the right side of the plate.

Although trailer plates for 1923 are not known, the law indicates that they should exist. The earliest that we know of is the 1924, and it and all other known years through 1931 measure roughly 4" x 8", having the appearance of a slightly elongated motorcycle plate. The 1924 bears the word "TRAILER," while 1927-1931 omit the word and substitute the letter "T" as a prefix, followed by a hyphen and the serial number. A photo of the one known 1924 plate (which is repainted) appears on p. 95 of the June 1987 *ALPCA Newsletter*, but the whereabouts of this plate today is unknown.

While Section 5 of the 1923 law clearly says that effective January 1, 1924, trailer plates were to show the weight and carrying capacity, the 1924 plate appears to have no provision for attachment of a seal (“tab”). The tabs do appear on the 1927-1929 plates, with each tab stamped “TRAILER,” along with the year, weight and capacity, but the format is unknown for 1925-1926, for which there are no known surviving examples. The description of the plates in the subsequent 1929 law has no mention of a requirement for the weight and capacity to be shown [*Laws of 1929*, Chapter 119, § 15], and in fact the 1930 trailer plates had no provision for a tab, not to mention there being no space for it on plates with 3-digit numbers. Consequently, no trailer plates after 1929 display the weight/capacity information.

In 1925 the decision was made to call a trailer a motor vehicle even though it didn’t have a motor. The law redefined the term as follows:

“The term ‘**motor vehicle**’ ... shall be construed to mean and include every motor vehicle and trailer subject to the payment of registration fees under the laws of this state.” [*Laws of 1925*, Chapter 82, § 5]

Four years later, additional definitions were given as trailers were classified into two distinct types:

“‘**Trailer.**’ Every vehicle without motive power designed for carrying property or passengers wholly on its own structure and for being drawn by a motor vehicle.”

“‘**Semi-Trailer.**’ Every vehicle of the trailer type so designed and used in conjunction with a motor vehicle that some part of its weight and that of its own load rests upon or is carried by another vehicle.” [*Laws of 1929*, Chapter 119, § 1]

Trailers were not particularly numerous in the 1920s and plates from that era are not often seen. The 1928 records show the highest number issued as #350, and even then there are numerous gaps earlier in the sequence. Interestingly, no makes or brand names are listed. The entries are shown only as “Trailer” or “Home Made,” though many of those listed as “Trailer” show a model year, which may imply that they were commercially manufactured. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1928*]

Three years later, in 1931, trailer registrations were up to at least 639, and while a very large proportion were still homemade, a number of brand names appeared, some of which are familiar today, including Utility, Highway, Springfield, Whitehead, Kingham (semi-trailer), Warner, Spencer, and others. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1931*]

Trailer plates for 1932 are for all practical purposes identical to 1932 Guest plates, but with the vertical “GST” replaced by a vertical “TRLR.” Very few 1932 Trailer plates have been seen in recent years, though the license plate purchase contract for that year shows that 850 Trailer plates were purchased (see



the chapter on “Manufacturers” for details). Of these, 587 were sold. [*Biennial Report of the Comptroller's Department ... for the Nineteenth and Twentieth Fiscal Years, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 34. (FY 1931 and FY 1932)*]

Beginning in 1932 trailer tags for the first time assumed the size and general appearance of passenger plates, and from 1933 on bore the word “TRAILER” spelled out in full. It would not be until 1955, the year before New Mexico’s plates were reduced from 6" x 14" to the new nationwide standard of 6" x 12", that the word “TRAILER” was dropped to conserve space, and the “T” prefix reintroduced, this time followed by the Zia symbol instead of a hyphen.

1933 saw 708 trailer plates issued by the time the *Automobile License Directory 1933* was published, and 884 were issued in 1934. Of these, the overwhelming number of them were homemade, with the relatively few commercially manufactured trailers being largely the province of very large industrial companies. Examples of the latter include Sinclair Refining Co., Shell Petroleum Corp., The Texas Company (Texaco), The Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Co., and the like. The New Mexico State Highway Department received a contiguous block of 154 of these 1933 plates, though no information is supplied in the registration listings as to what kind of trailers they were used on.

Up to this point in time trailer registrations show out-of-state addresses for some trailer owners, primarily commercial companies. These were probably the addresses of the company home offices, whereas the trailers themselves were stationed principally or wholly within New Mexico. The intent was probably that all out-of-state trailers that were operated commercially within the state for even relatively short periods of time be licensed, too, but the wording of the laws to date could be seen as being open to question on this matter.

In view of this, Chapter 139 of the *Laws of 1933* was rewritten in 1935 with respect to “Registration by non-residents” to eliminate any perceived ambiguity:

“Every non-resident, including any foreign corporation carrying on business within this state and owning and regularly operating in such business any motor vehicle, trailer or semi-trailer within this state, shall be required to register each such vehicle and pay the same fees therefor as is required with reference to like vehicles owned by residents of this state...” [*Laws of 1935, Chapter 56, Section 1(c)*]

A short grace period was allowed, but the effective result was a huge jump in trailer registrations over the 884 seen in 1934, to 2,474 in 1936, and a significant percentage of these were registered to out-of-state companies. The trailers were increasingly commercially made, and the brands we commonly associate with semi-trailers today—Fruehauf, Utility, Trailmobile, Highway, Hobbs, and the like—were appearing in increasing numbers.

The picture for the remainder of the 1930s was much the same as in 1936, but with registrations progressively increasing each year. Concurrently, fewer and fewer of the registered trailers were homemade, and more and more commercially manufactured equipment showed up in the lists. It would be many years before the scales tipped, but ultimately homemade trailers would be relegated to little more than a footnote in annual records.

No registration records from the 1940s have been found, but contemporary news reports reveal that in 1939 Revenue Commissioner J.O. Gallegos ordered 3,000 trailer plates from the State Pen to satisfy the need he anticipated for 1940. *[Santa Fe New Mexican, September 22, 1939, p.1, c.1]* It would not be at all surprising to learn that Gallegos found himself ordering an additional thousand or more during the coming year.

The utilization of windshield stickers on cars and trucks in 1943 did not affect trailers. Since trailers don't have windshields, they received the usual single metal plate for this year, in white-on-black colors. Nonetheless, 1943 trailer plates are quite rare, perhaps as a result of many of them being recycled in scrap drives during the height of the war.

During 1945 trailer tags were produced in both passenger plate colors and truck plate colors. The reason this was done is unknown.

Trailer plates for 1947 were made with a "county number" prefix to the left of the Zia symbol. Since 1947 was the first year for the use of county prefixes on passenger car and truck plates, it's logical to assume that these prefixes are what they appear to be. However, the fact that only a handful of different "county numbers" have been observed on these plates, raises the question as to whether the prefixes might have an altogether different meaning which is yet to be learned.

In 1949 two varieties of trailer plates were made, with the familiar waffle aluminum plates being the most common. But plates stamped on plain aluminum blanks were also manufactured, though in much smaller numbers.

### **Small Trailer**

A unique designation of "Small Trailer" was announced in 1954 for trailers under 1,000 pounds, with special plates for these to be issued in 1955. The serial number on these plates was prefixed by "ST" followed by a Zia and the serial number. *[Albuquerque Journal, December 12, 1954, p.42, c.6]* These were in passenger colors. The plates are relatively rare, and they were discontinued after only one year of issuance.

## **House Trailer**

House trailers (at least some of them) had been registered in the past, but these had always received standard trailer plates. In 1955, special plates were issued for house trailers for the first time. In passenger car colors, the tag serial number was prefixed with the letter “H.” *[Albuquerque Journal, December 12, 1954, p.42, c.6]* This series of plates continues to this day, but with the prefix later changed to “MH” for Mobile Home, and then later yet, redesignated (albeit with the same prefix) as “Manufactured Home.”

Years ago, particularly up into the 1950s, trailer houses were moved much more frequently than they are nowadays. In those days they carried standard trailer plates in New Mexico and it was logical that they do so. One would be inclined to think that once a house trailer was parked (in a trailer park, for example) there would be no more reason to require it to have a license plate than it is for a car that had quit running and was no longer in use.

But it turns out that there was a logical reason for doing so, and it all had to do with how the tax man was going to get his bite out of the owner’s hide. As long as a house trailer was on wheels—regardless of whether it was mobile or stationary—the owner paid only the vehicle registration fee for a House Trailer plate. Once the wheels were removed and the trailer was placed on a permanent foundation, the license plate was no longer required but the trailer was then subject to property tax. *[Farmington Daily Times, April 28, 1959, p.1, c.1]* Under most circumstances paying for the license plate was probably cheaper than paying property taxes each year.

## **Modern Trailer Plates**

The embossed word “TRAILER” had been dropped in 1955 with the introduction of the “T” prefix in the serial number, and for a number of years afterwards trailer plates maintained that same general character. Multi-year plates using renewal stickers were first introduced in 1961, but were not used continuously. Of those years in which stickers were used, 1969, 1970, 1973 and 1974 are notable in that the stickers themselves bear the word “TRAILER.” Then, in about 1992 the embossed word was reintroduced, but it lasted less than a decade before being eliminated once again.

## **Other Trailer Plate Types**

Please see the chapter on “Modern Plates” for details on other types of modern trailer plates, including Freight Trailer (FT), House Trailer (H), Prorate Trailer (PT), Rental Trailer (RT) and so forth.

## Trailer Plate Variations

Trailer plates from 1933 to 1951 are all very similar in design, and are notably different from those which came both before and after. There are, however, some subtle differences within the 1933-1951 tags that might escape notice of the casual observer. Principal among these is the fact that the Zia symbol was larger during 1933-1944 than it was from 1945 to 1951. The central circle of the larger Zia measures roughly 1½" in diameter while the smaller one measures about 1⅛". Moreover, two versions were manufactured in 1941, one with the large Zia and the other with the small Zia. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the larger size was used only on double Zia 1941 trailer plates, with the smaller size appearing on single Zia trailer tags of that year, though this has not yet been positively verified.

### Registration Data for Selected Trailer Plates Illustrated in this Chapter and on the NMplates.com website at NMplates.com/Trailer.htm

<u>Year</u>	<u>Plate #</u>	<u>Registered To</u>
1927	T-27	B.D. Wilson, Artesia
1928	T-13	R.A. Prentice, Tucumcari, 1927 trailer, 500 lbs.
1931	T-602	Maurice Dunn, Roswell, 1931 homemade 2-wheel, 500 lb.
1933	996	Not issued
1934	10	U.S. Reclamation Service, Las Cruces, 1920 trailer
1935	10	S. Warren Hall, III, Silver City, 1934 homemade semi-trailer
1936	306	Not issued
1937	2-891	Not issued
1938	489	Not issued

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/Trailer.htm>

# Truck

License plates bearing the word “TRUCK” first appeared in 1930, but they had their origin in a series of earlier plates that served the same type of vehicle. The reason for this was that New Mexico was a long time in deciding just exactly what a truck was, and what to call it.

Initially, trucks were ignored completely and weren’t even required to be licensed. The 1912 law was an *automobile* licensing law, not a motor vehicle law. Trucks and motorcycles escaped the registration requirement until the state legislature met again the following year and rewrote the law as a *motor vehicle* licensing law in 1913, which encompassed all motor vehicles, including trucks.

The new law was effective March 15, 1913 [Report of the Secretary of State Antonio Lucero for the Two Years Including November 30th, 1914, p. 12. These were the First and Second Fiscal Years, FY 1913 and FY 1914], and during the remainder of that year a handful of trucks came to be registered, along with one threshing machine! Still, for licensing purposes, trucks were treated as automobiles. Their fees were calculated the same way (based on horsepower), and they received the same license plates.

There was also an evolution of terms before the word “truck” became standardized in the vernacular, and on license plates.

The 1919 Laws of New Mexico, which became effective January 1, 1920, were the turning point where trucks and commercial vehicles first began to be separated from automobiles as a separate class, and with different (i.e., higher) registration fees. In Chapter 150, Section 1, of those laws a new definition was provided:

“ ***Motor Trucks***’ as used in this act shall include all motor vehicles using solid rubber or metal tires on two or more wheels. Motor trucks equipped with pneumatic tires shall be considered, for licensing purposes, the same as automobiles.”

So even at this point there was only one type of truck that was considered to be different from a car. If it had pneumatic tires, it was still considered an automobile. But if it had solid tires, it was a truck, and was called a Motor Truck. Section 4 of the 1919 Law set forth a table of licensing fees that was based on the horsepower of the vehicle. For any given horsepower, the fees for a Motor Truck were calculated at 25% more than for a car. But it still received the same license plates as a car.

It would not be until mid-1923, in compliance with the 1923 Motor Vehicle Law, that any New Mexico vehicles other than motorcycles (and those in the hands of dealers) would receive distinctive plates. Consequently, from 1913 to mid-1923 the same plates were issued to trucks as were given to cars, and the only way to tell them apart is to find them in the original registration records, for the few years that records survive.

The 1923 Motor Vehicle Law became effective on July 1, 1923, and contained this important clause: “Upon receipt of ... application and fee the registrar shall issue and deliver to [the] owner ... plates bearing the name of the State of New Mexico or abbreviation thereof, the number assigned to such vehicle and in case of a motor truck, commercial truck, commercial car mentioned in Section 3 hereof and in case of a trailer, a plate showing the weight and carrying capacity thereof.”

This was the genesis of a whole family of distinctive plates—Commercial Car, Commercial Truck, Motor Truck, and so forth—which would bear small metal tabs showing the weight and carrying capacity of the vehicle. These additional new commercial categories also came with higher registration fees, just as the Motor Truck fees had been hiked in 1920.

Vehicles which were already registered and equipped with regular porcelain plates had to be re-registered and the additional commercial fees paid, prorated for the remaining six months of the year. [1923 Laws, Chapter 96, Sec. 3] Their existing porcelain plates were replaced with embossed steel (“tin”) plates dated 1923. New registrants on and after July 1 received the tin plates as initial issues.

Embossed 1923 tin plates for both Commercial Car and Commercial Truck are fairly common, though, as set forth in the law, the mandated weight/capacity tabs didn’t show up until the 1924 issues.

It is important to note that these changes applied only to trucks in commercial service. Privately owned trucks—and there were many of them—were still treated as automobiles (unless they had solid tires) and they still received car tags until they, too, were separated out beginning in 1930.

As simple as it started out, the definition of “Motor Truck” evolved over a period of time to mean something much broader. The 1923 Laws, Section 1, changed the definition to this:

**“Motor Truck.** Any motor vehicle designed and used principally for carrying things other than passengers.”

In other words, anything that we would think of today as a “truck” was now called a “Motor Truck,” regardless of what kind of tires it used. Nonetheless, the 1923 law retained the 25% surcharge for all vehicles with solid tires, this time including solid-tired trailers, too. The penalty was increased to 100% by the 1929 Law for solid tires made of any material other than rubber (steel, for instance), making it clear that the state wanted them off the roads. In another important change, the registration fees for motor trucks in general were based for the first time not on horsepower, but on carrying capacity.

The 1929 law, which was far more comprehensive than any of the prior motor vehicle laws, omitted any definition of “Truck” or “Motor Truck,” which is interpreted to mean that the definition had not changed since the previous law. Chapter 119, § 28 (2)(e) of the 1929 law also set forth a schedule of fees based not on carrying capacity, but on curb weight.

This law set into motion significant changes in license plates. In 1930, gone were Commercial Car and Commercial Truck plates. In their stead were “Bus” and “Truck” plates, respectively. So here we see the introduction of the first true truck plate, bearing the word “TRUCK” boldly embossed vertically on the right side, a format which would remain unchanged for almost a quarter century. The only exceptions to this otherwise unbroken run were 1932, when the word TRUCK was placed horizontally along the bottom of the plate, and 1943, when paper windshield stickers were issued in place of metal plates.

As in the case of the 1943 stickers for cars, each truck sticker had its own unique serial number. New Mexico truck owners kept their 1942 plates, wrote the 1942 plate number in a box provided for that purpose on the 3" x 5¼" sticker [Clovis News-Journal, October 13, 1942, p.8, c.3], and affixed it to the inside, lower right hand corner of the windshield (as viewed from the driver’s seat). [Albuquerque Journal, December 3, 1942, p.1, c.2]

The newly introduced truck plates for 1930 were officially announced as being gold on black [New Mexico Highway Journal, August 1929, p. 26.], but in fact turned out to be butterscotch on black. Initially, for a few years, truck plate colors were the same as passenger plate colors, but were changed to the reverse colors most other years through 1960. For unknown reasons they were painted completely different colors for two years in the mid-1940s, as well as in some later years beginning in the 1960s. These are summarized in the following table, along with other technical details:

## Truck Plate Colors 1930 – 1991

- 1930–1931** Same as passenger plate colors, i.e., 1930 butterscotch on black, 1931 black on dark yellow (almost butterscotch). “TRUCK” is vertical at right.
- 1932** Same as passenger plate colors, white on dark green. “TRUCK” is horizontal at bottom.
- 1933–1942** Reverse of passenger plate colors, with “TRUCK” vertical at right. Truck colors, therefore, are:
- 1933 Dark yellow on red.
  - 1934 Yellowish red on dark yellow.
  - 1935 Dark blue on white.
  - 1936 White on dark blue.
  - 1937 Robin’s egg blue on maroon (but officially called “turquoise blue on Navajo red.” [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 23, 1936, p.1, c.1])
  - 1938 Bright yellow on black.
  - 1939 Deep orange on black.
  - 1940 Bright red on dark yellow.
  - 1941 Dark yellow on bright red.
  - 1942 White on black.
- 1943** Windshield sticker, red background.
- 1944** Reverse of passenger plate colors, with the truck colors being black on white. “TRUCK” is vertical at right.
- 1945** White on burgundy. “TRUCK” is vertical at right.
- 1946** Reverse of passenger plate colors, i.e., truck colors are bright yellow on dark brownish red. “TRUCK” is vertical at right.
- 1947** Black on yellow. “TRUCK” is vertical at right. County number prefixes introduced.



- 1948–1951** Reverse of passenger plate colors. “TRUCK” is vertical at right. Truck colors for this period, therefore, are:
- 1948 Dark blue on white.
  - 1949 White on dark blue. (1949 is waffle aluminum like cars.)
  - 1950 Dark blue on white.
  - 1951 White on dark blue.
- 1952** Reverse of passenger plate colors, i.e., truck tags are white on red, and in two varieties: with “TRUCK” vertical at right, and without “TRUCK.” The latter variety is believed to be extremely rare, with perhaps no more than a few dozen in existence. The second variety came about with the introduction of wider dies during the 1952 production year, and Bernalillo County reaching 10,000 truck registrations for the first time late that year. The two conditions combined to leave no space for “TRUCK” on plates with six total digits, e.g., 2-10000 and higher.
- 1953** Reverse of passenger plate colors, i.e., trucks are red on white, and in two varieties: with “TRUCK” vertical at right, and without “TRUCK.” Both types are relatively easy to find.
- 1954** Reverse of passenger plate colors, with truck plates being white on red. “TRUCK” legend permanently eliminated beginning with 1954. Some (but not all) of the later years which used stickers had the word “TRUCK” on the sticker.
- 1955** Reverse of passenger plate colors, i.e., truck tags are burnt maroon on dark yellow.
- 1956** Reverse of passenger plate colors, i.e., trucks are reddish brown on white. In concert with all other states in the country, all New Mexico plates were standardized to the 6" x 12" size this year.
- 1957–1959** Reverse of passenger plate colors, with the truck colors being as follows:
- 1957 White on green.
  - 1958 Yellow on red.
  - 1959 Red on yellow.
- 1960** Yellow metal tab (as compared to red metal tab on passenger plates) with black-on-white 1960 sticker used to renew 1959 plates. New issues also received 1959 base with yellow metal tab and sticker.
- 1961** Green on white, undated.

- 1962–1963** Green on white undated 1961 base, with 1962 and 1963 stickers, respectively, for both renewals and new issues.
- Popular belief has long held that New Mexico issued two styles of undated base plates concurrently in 1961, i.e., reflective white and painted white, and did so through 1963 for truck plates. In actuality, the reflective bases were dropped as a cost saving measure and entirely replaced by painted plates. The reflective coating was 3M's proprietary Scotchlite which then cost 46 cents per plate, vs. 16 cents for regular paint. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 5, 1962, p.2, c.1] Once the decision was made and the existing supply of Scotchlite was exhausted, the switch was implemented, taking place in late 1962.
- In summary, reflective truck plates were issued in 1961 and 1962 (and were renewable through 1963), then were discontinued and replaced by painted base plates beginning very late in 1962, for issue in 1963. Consequently, though there are two different varieties of truck base plates for this period, they are actually from different years, and only in 1963 were both on the road at the same time. (A few passenger and trailer plates issued very late in 1962 are known to be on painted bases; there may be a few very late 1962 truck tags on painted bases as well.)
- 1964** Black on reflective yellow with embossed "64" on plates for counties 1-9, and a "64" sticker for higher numbered counties.
- 1965** Black on reflective yellow 1964 base plate with 1965 sticker for both renewals and new issues.
- 1966** Dark blue on reflective white. These plates were issued in two varieties: (1) with an embossed "66" date in the lower left corner on plates for counties 1-9, and (2), for higher numbered counties, a blue-on-reflective-white "66" sticker was pre-applied to the lower right corner of the plate. A third variety with a blue "66" silk screened directly onto the plate has been reported, but not confirmed.
- 1967–1970** Dark blue on reflective white 1966 base plate with 1967–1970 stickers, respectively, for both renewals and new issues. "TRUCK" is printed on stickers for all years 1967–1970. "USA" added after state name 1969-1974, then deleted thereafter.
- 1971** White on reflective light green with embossed "71" in lower left corner for counties 1-9, and in lower right corner for higher numbered counties.

- 1972–1974** White on reflective light green 1971 base plate with 1972–1974 stickers, respectively, for both renewals and new issues. Note that whereas passenger car plates dropped the county numbers and switched to a 3-letter, 3-number configuration beginning in 1972, truck plates continued to use the county numbers for three more years, through 1974. “TRUCK” is printed on 1973 and 1974 stickers, but *not* on 1972.
- 1975** Red on reflective yellow with embossed “75” in lower right corner. (The red on reflective yellow color scheme would remain hereafter unchanged, through the end of this type of plate in 1991.)
- Beginning with 1975, county numbers were dropped and a 2-letter, 4-number format was introduced, starting at AA\*0001, where “\*” is the Zia symbol. As the serial number sequence progressed over the following years, some 2-letter combinations were skipped because of conflict with the letter pairs used on certain other non-passenger plates. The omitted combinations included, but were not limited to, the following:
- CB (Commercial Bus), DE (Driver Education), DL (Dealer), DM (Dealer Manufacturer), FT (Freight Trailer), IR (Interstate), PR (Prorate truck), PT (Prorate Trailer), SB (School Bus), TA-TZ (Trailer), WR (Wrecker).
- 1976 & later** The 1975 base plates were used for a relatively short time, along with appropriate stickers for both renewals and new issues. Ultimately, though, dated plates were abandoned and all newly issued base plates became undated, with stickers showing the year of expiration. Upon the introduction of staggered registration in April 1982, the stickers from then on showed both the year and month of expiration.
- 1991** In January 1991, issuance of truck plates as a unique type was terminated, ending the practice initiated more than six decades earlier. (Renewals of existing truck plates continued for another year and a half.) Trucks since then have been issued passenger car plates, and considering that nowadays most of these gas hogs are used as family cars, it is unlikely that there will be a reappearance of a separate type of plate for these vehicles.

**Note:** Please see the chapters on “Commercial Truck” and “Motor Truck” for more details on these two types of plates.

## Photographs for this Chapter

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When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/Truck.htm>

# U.S. Official

When New Mexico began licensing motor vehicles it made no exemption for vehicles owned by any governmental agencies operating within the state, whether they were federal, state, county, or municipal. Early registration records show vehicles owned by a number of different federal agencies—motorcycles included—registered at least as early as 1913. The entries in the early handwritten ledgers for plates issued to federal agencies generally contained the notation “gratis” in the FEES PAID column, indicating that they were free of charge.

Plates provided to federal government vehicles were standard “civilian” license plates issued in sequence along with all the others. There was nothing to distinguish them from any other plate, and this remained the case for nearly two decades.

In 1923 the legislature exempted both state and federal vehicles from the licensing requirement in this way:

“Motor vehicles or trailers owned by and used in the service of the State of New Mexico or any county or municipality thereof, or the United States, or any other State or country need not be registered but must constantly display plates or signs plainly setting forth the name of the State, county, municipality or government in whose service they are operated.” [1923 *Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 96, Sec. 10]

According to the law, an agency electing to forgo registration would still be required to “display plates or signs” that identified the agency. Arranging to have such plates or signs made would have been more trouble than getting a free plate by simply registering the vehicle, and indications from the available records are that most everyone continued to do just that.

The *1928 Motor Vehicle Register*, for example, shows plate numbers 583 to 589 as all having been issued to the U.S. Prohibition Department, stationed in Albuquerque. (The Revenooers were driving mostly Buicks and Fords, but also had one Cadillac in their inventory.) Other federal agencies were represented as well. Although the registration records therefore clearly show that at least some federal vehicles received regular “civilian” license plates in that year, a news report from January 1928 revealed that “For the first time motor vehicles owned by the federal government are to have special New Mexico license plates. ... One hundred new federal plates are numbered ‘U.S.’” [Carlsbad Current-Argus, January 27, 1928, p.8, c.3] (The reference to “one hundred plates” presumably meant one hundred *pairs* of plates.)

Plates designed specifically for federal government vehicles operating within the state have survived in significant numbers from 1931. With the same size and colors as passenger plates, they bear the word “OFFICIAL” at the top, and a large “U.S.” suffixed to the serial number. Such plates are not known to have survived from any earlier years, but the Comptroller’s biennial report explicitly lists 400 pairs of U.S. Official plates having been purchased for use in 1930, with 187 of those issued, 2 canceled, and 211 unused pairs left over at the end of the year. [*Biennial Report of the Comptroller’s Department ... for the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Fiscal Years*, R.F. Asplund, *State Comptroller*, p. 17. (FY 1929 and FY 1930)]

The numbers given for 1928 and 1930 are high enough to where there is reason to hope that examples of U.S. Official plates from 1928, 1929 and 1930 may yet surface someday, though the possibility exists that regular Official plates were used on federal vehicles in 1929 rather than the purpose-made “U.S.” plates.

In 1931, at least 250 pairs of U.S. Official plates were manufactured (inferred from known plate numbers), though only about a hundred pairs are shown in the registration and Comptroller records as having been issued. Some of the agencies receiving them that year were:

- U.S. Acclimatization Station
- U.S. Army Ordinance Department
- U.S. Biological Survey
- U.S. Bureau of Plant Industries
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Customs Service
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Department of Justice
- U.S. Department of the Interior
- U.S. General Land Office
- U.S. Immigration Service
- U.S. National Highway Association
- U.S. National Park Service
- U.S. Pueblo Lands Board
- U.S. War Department

Clearly, there was an over-estimation of the number of U.S. Official plates needed in both 1930 and 1931. Eight years later Revenue Commissioner J.O. Gallegos announced that 250 U.S. Official plate pairs were to be manufactured for 1940. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, September 22, 1939, p.1, c. 1] Presumably the estimate was more accurate at that time and fewer plates had to be discarded at the end of the year.

In 1932 the “US” was moved to the front of the serial number, where it became a prefix, with the rest of the design remaining basically unchanged. The

plates continued in that general format for as long as U.S. Official plates were in use. These plates are known for most years into the 1940s (always in passenger plate colors), as well as some undated issues from as late as the 1980s. The latter are in the same maroon-on-light-blue color scheme used by state Official plates of that time period. It is unknown why these plates continued so long, as federal government vehicles were carrying their own plates decades before the 1980s. The last one that I personally saw in use was on a fire truck on an Indian reservation in the mid-to-late 1980s, but the vehicle likely belonged to a federal agency rather than to a tribal government.

**Registration Data for Selected U.S. Official Plates  
Illustrated in this Chapter  
and on the NMplates.com website at  
NMplates.com/USOfficial.htm**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Plate #</u></b>	<b><u>Registered To</u></b>
1931	216-US	Not issued
1933	US-8	Not issued
1935	US-268	Not issued
1936	US-211	U.S. Pueblo Agency, Albuquerque, 1936 Ford pickup, 1,962 lbs.
1937	US-244	Not issued

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# 1943 Windshield Stickers

America's military buildup prior to and during World War II resulted in severe shortages of raw materials, but probably none so acute as that caused by the demand for steel. Every possible means of conservation of metals was considered, and New Mexico joined many other states in the elimination of metal license plates for 1943.

From the time in 1939 when Hitler ignited the conflict that was to become World War II, the United States worked assiduously to bolster its military defense capabilities through the manufacture of armaments for herself and, later, for her allies. Shortages of raw materials were already appearing long before the U.S. itself was in the shooting war.

On November 2, 1941, Antonio C De Baca, Chief Clerk of the Motor Vehicle Division, announced that in all probability there would be no license plates made for 1943. The 1942 plates had already been manufactured, so there was nothing that could be done about that. But for 1943 several options were being considered, including the use of small metal tags, and even plastic substitutes for plates. The most likely solution, though, he said, would be to use windshield stickers. [*Clovis News-Journal*, November 2, 1941, p.1, c.2]

When America was catapulted into the war by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor a month later, on December 7, 1941, the fate was sealed for 1943 plates.

On June 23, 1942, De Baca made known that in place of the usual metal plates for 1943, a small paper windshield sticker (also referred to as a decalcomania, or decal for short) would be used. S.M. Delgado of the Tourist Bureau was given responsibility to come up with the design. [*Albuquerque Journal*, June 24, 1942, p.8, c.8]

The Motor Vehicle Department solicited bids for manufacture of the stickers, and on October 13, 1942, Mr. C De Baca released a statement announcing that the state had accepted the bid of the Meyercord company of Chicago for approximately 100,000 stickers at a price of \$29.90 per thousand, bringing the total order to about \$3,000. The company's bid was described as the "lowest and best" of five bids received. [*Clovis News-Journal*, October 13, 1942, p.8, c.3] Meyercord, which is still in business today (but no longer manufactures products of this type), also produced similar license stickers for other states during the war years.

It is known from surviving examples that these stickers were provided in both passenger car and truck varieties. Whether separate designs were produced

for Official, Highway Department, Commercial, and/or other types is as yet unlearned. The Public Roads Administration statistics for 1943 reported that a total of 108,145 vehicles were registered during the year, comprised of 80,175 passenger cars, 27,356 trucks, and 1,314 buses. These figures do not include Official or U.S. Official vehicles, which together would have added another thousand or so to the grand total. Whatever the case, if only 100,000 stickers were received in the original order, it would have been necessary to purchase at least another 7,500 stickers before the year was out just to satisfy the need for cars and trucks alone.

Although each sticker had its own unique serial number, New Mexico motorists kept their 1942 plates, wrote the 1942 plate number in a box provided for that purpose on the 3" x 5¼" sticker [*Clovis News-Journal*, October 13, 1942, p.8, c.3], and affixed it to the inside, lower right hand corner of the windshield (as viewed from the driver's seat). [*Albuquerque Journal*, December 3, 1942, p.1, c.2]

Meanwhile, the motor vehicle department anticipated that there would be some number of people whose license plates would become lost or damaged beyond use during the year. Warden John B. McManus of the state penitentiary expressed his belief that the institution would have sufficient steel on hand to make replacements for 1942 license plates in those instances. [*Clovis News-Journal*, October 13, 1942, p.8, c.3] Identifying such a plate would require finding the pertinent registration records, but if that could be done, the possibility is raised of having a 1943-produced 1942 plate, which in some minds would be akin to finding a copper 1943 penny.

Motorcycles and trailers—vehicles which typically did not have windshields—received standard embossed steel license plates for 1943. The motorcycles would have numbered probably fewer than 600, and the trailers perhaps a few thousand, with only one plate being issued to each. Dealer tags were also issued as metal plates in 1943, rather than as windshield stickers. [*Albuquerque Journal*, Dec. 12, 1942, p.5, c.8] This is perfectly logical considering the intended purpose of dealer plates, and their manner of use. However, as no cars were manufactured during the war for civilian consumption, new car dealers had nothing to sell. Probably no more than a handful of these plates would have been made and they are presumed to have been quite rare even when new. In total then, this was a minimal use of steel as compared to the amount saved on cars and trucks.

There is evidence to support the belief that a metal Governor plate #1 was made in 1943 as well. Please see the chapter on "Governor & Lt. Governor" for more details.

A photo of an automobile bearing both its 1942 plate and the corresponding 1943 sticker appeared in the 1943 Eastern New Mexico College (now ENMU) yearbook, the *Silver Pack*. Alice Sharp of Portales is in that photo by the car, but it's unknown whether the car belonged to her.

The 1943 windshield sticker is one of the rarest of all New Mexico passenger "plates," with perhaps fewer in existence than even the 1912/1913 first-issue plates. Once glued to the windshield, it could not be removed without destroying it. (The state made matters worse when it required that the stickers be scraped off upon issuance of the 1944 metal plates, a campaign which continued into 1945. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 14, 1945, p.1, c.3]) The handful that survive are ones that were never put on the windshield in the first place. And of that handful, only two are known to survive as a set with their matching 1942 plates, one of these in the author's collection.

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

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# 1951 Windshield Stickers

When World War II ended it seemed that the shortages that had been endured in the name of national defense were over for good. America's production capacity had been vastly increased during the war, and there were untold quantities of war materials, now unneeded, which were being scrapped and reused for consumer goods.

Ironically, an unbounded post-war demand for consumer goods—especially automobiles, trucks, farm equipment, and major home appliances—demanded even more production capacity than had been seen during the war. On top of that were the military demands of the Korean War which had erupted in the middle of 1950, and the already-simmering Cold War between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Barely five years after V-J Day, the U.S. found itself again scraping the barrel for critical materials, and particularly for steel.

Production of New Mexico's 1951 plates had begun at the State Penitentiary during the latter part of 1950, and a good supply was on hand to begin filling re-registration requirements for existing vehicles, though more would have to be made during the year to supply the nearly 23,000 new vehicles which would be registered during the 1951 calendar year.

Nonetheless, in March, a looming shortage was seen, though at that point in time it was thought that it would be the 1952 tags which would suffer. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 22, 1951, p.16, c.6] By May the supply situation had gotten so much worse that it was becoming obvious that not only were 1952 plates in peril, but steel would likely not be obtainable even to produce the remaining 1951 tags needed once the existing supply ran out. When this was realized there were only 3,150 car plates and 600 truck plates on hand, with no new supply of either steel or aluminum on the horizon. What little steel left at the Pen might be enough to finish out motorcycle and trailer plates for the year, Motor Vehicle Commissioner Ed Brosseau thought. (This situation probably explains why some late-production 1951 motorcycle plates were made out of leftover 1949 waffle aluminum blanks.) Brosseau therefore ordered 30,000 windshield stickers, which would be used once there were no 1951 metal plates left. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 20, 1951, p.1, c.2]

The referenced article does not state whether this was 30,000 pairs of stickers, or 30,000 individual stickers (i.e., 15,000 pairs), but in view of the fact that by this date all re-registrations had long since been accomplished, and nearly half the year's new car purchases had already been licensed, it seems certain that the number is in reference to 15,000 *pairs* of stickers.

The exact date that the 1951 metal plates ran out is not known, but based on the number remaining in late May, and the known average number of new car registrations running at almost 2,000 per month, it is likely that the stickers were being issued no later than the end of July. And as will be seen shortly, the 1951 stickers were indeed issued in pairs (in contrast to the singles issued in 1943), as confirmed by later news reports.

Within a few months the picture was beginning to look a little brighter. On August 8, the state's purchasing agent, G.T. McWhirter, announced that he had been able to buy 18,000 pounds of steel with which to resume manufacture of 1951 plates. This material would be used to make tags not only for the remaining new registrations, but to replace the paper windshield stickers already issued.

*[Santa Fe New Mexican, August 9, 1951, p.B6, c.7]*

A week and a half later the prison was again stamping out 1951 metal plates. These plates were to "be used first for new cars, then to replace the window stickers which have been used for months." *[Clovis News-Journal, August 19, 1951, p.7, c.3]*

On October 28, 1951, Brosseau announced that the state had finally caught up on the manufacture and issuance of 1951 plates, and that all cars which had been issued windshield stickers earlier in the year now had metal plates. With that having been accomplished, he said, the stickers would no longer be recognized, and the State Police would cite any drivers without metal plates. "All told, 5,500 pairs of stickers had been issued," Brosseau reported. *[Santa Fe New Mexican, October 28, 1951, p.A3, c.5]*

This last information confirms that the 1951 windshield stickers were issued in pairs, and that only 5,500 pairs out of the 15,000 pairs purchased by the state were put to use. What happened to the other 9,500 pairs? They probably went in the trash heap in Santa Fe, and are still composting there underground.

Prior to issuance of the 1951 substitutes, contemporary news reports universally referred to them as "stickers." The only clue that they might have been something other than that appeared after manufacture of steel plates was about to resume and the news media reported that the "paper tags" already issued might soon be replaced with metal plates. *[Santa Fe New Mexican, August 9, 1951, p.B6, c.7]*

Even though some 11,000 individual tags were issued, not a single one is verified to have survived, nor can we even be sure of exactly what they looked like. There are, however, several known examples of what appear to be prototypes or samples of these paper windshield plates. Printed on thin paper and measuring 3" x 5", they are just slightly smaller than New Mexico's 1943 windshield stickers. Both passenger and truck varieties are known, and a photograph of one of these is illustrated at the end of this chapter and on the NMplates.com website at [nmplates.com/Windshield Stickers 1951.htm](http://nmplates.com/Windshield%20Stickers%201951.htm).

The conclusion that they are probably prototypes or samples is drawn from the fact that multiple examples of them bear the same serial number. Moreover, ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner has seen evidence among old Massachusetts RMV records that the New Mexico DMV distributed samples to the corresponding departments of other states so that officials of those jurisdictions would be made aware of the existence and appearance of the substitutes.

Metal plates in 1951 were blue on white for cars and white on blue for trucks. The 1951 paper truck sample tag illustrated in this chapter is silver on blue which is not a far cry from white on blue. Perhaps silver was used in lieu of white to make them a little harder to counterfeit, or maybe just to make them more attractive. And the colors are the reverse, i.e., blue on silver, for at least one of the known 1951 paper passenger sample tags.

As we await the discovery of an original 1951 windshield license that was actually issued for use on a motor vehicle, the samples/prototypes are our only guide as to what they looked like. If these were in fact provided to other motor vehicle departments for the purpose mentioned earlier, it is likely that they are quite accurate, if not exact, representations of the real ones.

The fact that the 9,500 unissued pairs of these paper tags might have been destroyed by the DMV is understandable, but why have none of the 11,000 tags that were actually issued ever been found? If they were stickers along the lines of their 1943 cousins there would have been no way to recover them from the windshield. If they were loose tags which were not glued to the windshield we can only surmise that motorists were required to surrender them in exchange for the metal plates that replaced them. If that were the case, the used tags were almost certainly destroyed as well.

New Mexico's 1943 wartime windshield stickers have long been contenders as the holy grail of New Mexico license plates. Though these stickers were issued only as singles, a handful of them—probably fewer than ten—do exist today. Not even that can be said about the 1951 paper tags.

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link:

<https://NMplates.com/Windshield%20Stickers%201951.htm>



# County Allocations and County Prefixes

The 1912 automobile license law directed that automobile owners make application to the Secretary of State in Santa Fe, who in turn issued a paper license, and a metal license plate bearing the same number as appeared on the paper license. Between August 16 and December 31, 1912, the Secretary of State's office processed and mailed out 904 licenses and license plates, a manageable task even for what was probably a relatively small office. Initially, the annual renewal deadline was set as October 31, but the 1913 motor vehicle law changed that to December 31.

By the end of 1914, the number of registered vehicles had more than tripled, not only imposing an ever-increasing burden on the Secretary of State's office, but doing so right in the middle of the Christmas holiday season. The situation got even worse as registrations increased exponentially in subsequent years. One can only imagine that it was necessary to hire extra help during the annual renewal rush, and in some later years the office bought itself a little extra time when a grace period was added to the renewal deadline extending it to January 31.

The annual renewal operation had to be an onerous job that severely disrupted the other work of the office. By 1923 the *Santa Fe New Mexican* reported that R.H. Carter, the State Comptroller (the office to which the motor vehicle registration function had recently been transferred), was formulating a plan to farm out the work to the counties. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, October 26, 1923, an article which was reprinted the following month in the November 1923 Issue of the *New Mexico Highway Journal*.] His plan, which he expected to recommend to the next State Legislature, proposed that "a certain series of numbers will be assigned to each county—if Bernalillo county has 5,000 autos, it will get the series from 1 to 5,000; if Catron has 500, it will get the series from 5,001 to 5,500, and so on. In this way a peace officer will be able to tell at a glance what county any auto is from."

Late in 1924 Carter announced that before the first of the year he would be sending representatives to Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Silver City, Clovis, Roswell, Las Vegas and Raton, along with a supply of 1925 license plates, "for the convenience of motor vehicle owners who wish to file their applications with these representatives instead of mailing them to Santa Fe or coming to Santa Fe themselves to get" the plates. [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, December 1924, p. 15] There was no mention of whether numerically sequential blocks of plates would be issued, though this almost certainly was the case, as it would have been impractical to do otherwise. Nonetheless, it does not appear that this was even the purpose of the 1924 experiment.

Nothing further came of Carter’s original 1923 proposal for another four years, and when it was finally implemented it turned out to be nowhere near as straightforward as what he had recommended in 1923. The *Roswell Daily Record* [December 5, 1927, p.1, c.2] reported it this way after distribution of 1928 plates had already begun:

“Automobile license plates for 1928 were being issued today in every county seat in New Mexico, H. C. Roehl, in charge of the state motor vehicle department, announced. ‘For the first time in the history of the department the county assessors have their tax rolls complete, so the automobile owner can obtain the tax receipt he must present before he can get his license,’ said Roehl. ‘Deputies are issuing licenses in every county seat. Licenses will not be issued after January 1 without the addition of a penalty. They may obtain also at this [Santa Fe] office by application either in person, or by mail.’”

As stated in the *Daily Record* article, owners could get their plates either at the county seat, or by mail from Santa Fe. New Mexico is a big state (the fifth largest in the nation, including Alaska), and in many cases it was far easier to get plates by mail than it was to travel to the county seat. Just as they were for counties, blocks of license plates were reserved for mail distribution, but in a rather haphazard way.

The following table summarizes how the plates were allocated in 1928.

### 1928 New Mexico License Plate Allocation by Counties

Number of Plates					Number of Plates				
Start	End	County	Including such cities as		Start	End	County	Including such cities as	
1 GOV	1 GOV	1 Santa Fe	Governor Richard C. Dillon		27651	27700	50 San Juan	Farmington, Aztec, Shiprock, Bloomfield	
1A	1A	1 Santa Fe	Governor Richard C. Dillon		27701	29200	1500 Roosevelt	Portales, Kenna, Elida, Dora	
1	1	1 Bernalillo	D.E. Barton, Albuquerque, for a 1927 Stutz		29201	30450	1250 Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving	
2	2	1 Rio Arriba	Lt. Governor Edward Sargent		30451	31400	950 Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter	
3	50	48 mixed	Miscellaneous big wigs, mixed locations.		31401	31450	50 Lea	Lovington, Tatum, Hobbs, Caprock	
51	100	50 Colfax	Raton, Swastika, Gardiner, Springer		31451	31720	270 Mora	Mora, Wagon Mound	
101	350	250 Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid		31721	31770	50 San Miguel	Las Vegas, East Las Vegas	
351	6400	6050 Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs		31771	31850	80 mixed		
6401	6800	400 Sandoval	Bernalillo, Algodones, Jemez, Cuba		31851	33350	1500 San Miguel	Las Vegas, East Las Vegas	
6801	6900	100 Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs		33351	34150	800 Otero	Alamogordo, Tularosa, La Luz, Cloudercroft	
6901	7800	900 Valencia	Belen, Valencia, Los Lunas, Grants		34151	34750	600 Lincoln	Carrizozo, Capitan, Ft. Stanton, Corona	
7801	7900	100 Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs		34751	34850	100 Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid	
7901	8400	500 Lea	Lovington, Tatum, Hobbs, Caprock		34851	35350	500 Hidalgo	Lordsburg, Animas, Valedon, Hachita	
8401	9650	1250 Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving		35351	36150	800 Luna	Deming, Faywood, Nutt, Gage, Columbus	
9651	12150	2500 Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter		36151	38850	2700 Grant	Silver City, Santa Rita, Hurley, Bayard	
12151	13650	1500 Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister		38851	38950	100 Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	
13651	14050	400 De Baca	Ft. Sumner, Taiban		38951	39000	50 Luna	Deming, Faywood, Nutt, Gage, Columbus	
14051	16850	2800 Curry	Clovis, Melrose, St. Vrain, Bellview		39001	39150	150 Hidalgo	Lordsburg, Animas, Valedon, Hachita	
16851	19200	2350 Colfax	Raton, Swastika, Gardiner, Springer		39151	39200	50 Lincoln	Carrizozo, Capitan, Ft. Stanton, Corona	
19201	19300	100 Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs		39201	39300	100 Sandoval	Bernalillo, Algodones, Jemez, Cuba	
19301	19650	350 mixed			39301	39350	50 mixed		
19651	20225	575 Guadalupe	Santa Rosa, Vaughn, Pastura		39351	39750	400 Taos	Taos, Arroyo Seco, Tres Piedras	
20226	20250	25 Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid		39751	40250	500 Torrance	Mountainair, Encino, Moriarty, Estancia	
20251	20650	400 Sierra	Hot Springs, Hillsboro, Monticello, Kingston		40251	41950	1700 Union	Clayton, Des Moines, Capulin, Folsom	
20651	21284	634 Socorro	Socorro, Magdalena, San Antonio		41951	42075	125 Colfax	Raton, Swastika, Gardiner, Springer	
21285	21700	416 mixed			42076	42150	75 mixed		
21701	24650	2950 Doña Ana	Las Cruces, Mesilla Park, Organ, Hatch		42151	42634	484 Harding	Roy, Mosquero, Mills, Solano, Buyers	
24651	24870	220 Catron	Reserve, Quemado, Mogollon, Glenwood		42635	42650	16 mixed		
24871	24900	30 mixed			42651	42850	200 Rio Arriba	Tierra Amarilla, Chama, Dulce	
24901	25800	900 San Juan	Farmington, Aztec, Shiprock, Bloomfield		42851	42900	50 mixed		
25801	25900	100 mixed			42901	43200	300 Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid	
25901	27600	1700 McKinley	Gallup, Crownpoint, Bluewater, Thoreau		43201	43350	150 mixed		
27601	27650	50 Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs		43351	43500	150 Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid	

43501	43900	400	mixed		55301	55600	300	mixed	
43901	44100	200	Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid	55601	55650	50	Roosevelt	Portales, Kenna, Elida, Dora
44101	44379	279	Torrance	Mountainair, Encino, Moriarty, Estancia	55651	55850	200	mixed	
44380	44451	72	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	55851	55900	50	Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid
44452	44500	49	Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid	55901	56000	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
44501	44550	50	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	56001	56100	100	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter
44551	44600	50	Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid	56101	56200	100	mixed	
44601	44800	200	Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving	56201	56300	100	Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving
44801	44850	50	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter	56301	56500	200	mixed	
44851	44900	50	Lea	Lovington, Tatum, Hobbs, Caprock	56501	56600	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs 56601
44901	45100	200	Roosevelt	Portales, Kenna, Elida, Dora	56850	250	mixed		
45101	45350	250	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter	56851	56900	50	Lea	Lovington, Tatum, Hobbs, Caprock
45351	45400	50	Curry	Clovis, Melrose, St. Vrain, Bellview	56901	57050	150	mixed	
45401	46400	1000	Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid	57051	57100	50	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
46401	46800	400	mixed		57101	57150	50	San Juan	Farmington, Aztec, Shiprock, Bloomfield
46801	46918	118	Otero	Alamogordo, Tularosa, La Luz, Cloudcroft	57151	57200	50	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
46919	47350	432	mixed		57201	57350	150	mixed	
47351	47750	400	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	57351	57450	100	Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving
47751	47950	200	mixed		57451	57650	200	mixed	
47951	48300	350	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	57651	57731	81	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
48301	48400	100	Valencia	Belen, Valencia, Los Lunas, Grants	57732	57750	19	mixed	
48401	48450	50	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	57751	57800	50	Sandoval	Bernalillo, Algodones, Jemez, Cuba
48451	48600	150	Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister	57801	57950	150	mixed	
48601	48649	49	Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid	57951	58050	100	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter
48650	48950	301	mixed		58051	58150	100	mixed	
48951	49100	150	McKinley	Gallup, Crownpoint, Bluewater, Thoreau	58151	58250	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
49101	49750	650	mixed		58251	58350	100	Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister
49751	49850	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	58351	58400	50	Roosevelt	Portales, Kenna, Elida, Dora
49851	50300	450	mixed		58401	59000	600	mixed	
50301	50400	100	McKinley	Gallup, Crownpoint, Bluewater, Thoreau	59001	59200	200	Curry	Clovis, Melrose, St. Vrain, Bellview
50401	50800	400	mixed		59201	59350	150	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
50801	50900	100	Curry	Clovis, Melrose, St. Vrain, Bellview	59351	59450	100	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter
50901	51000	100	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter	59451	59500	50	Union	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter
51001	51050	50	Union	Clayton, Des Moines, Capulin, Folsom	59501	59650	150	mixed	
51051	51350	300	mixed		59651	59750	100	Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving
51351	51400	50	Sandoval	Bernalillo, Algodones, Jemez, Cuba	59751	59800	50	Lea	Lovington, Tatum, Hobbs, Caprock
51401	51500	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	59801	59850	50	mixed	
51501	51600	100	mixed		59851	59900	50	Roosevelt	Portales, Kenna, Elida, Dora
51601	51700	100	Union	Clayton, Des Moines, Capulin, Folsom	59901	60000	100	mixed	
51701	51800	100	Curry	Clovis, Melrose, St. Vrain, Bellview	60001	60050	50	San Juan	Farmington, Aztec, Shiprock, Bloomfield
51801	51900	100	mixed		60051	60150	100	mixed	
51901	52000	100	Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister	60151	60250	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
52001	52050	50	Santa Fe	Santa Fe, Espanola, Cerillos, Madrid	60251	60300	50	mixed	
52051	52150	100	Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister	60301	60500	200	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter
52151	52200	50	San Juan	Farmington, Aztec, Shiprock, Bloomfield	60501	60850	350	mixed	
52201	52900	700	mixed		60851	60900	50	Union	Clayton, Des Moines, Capulin, Folsom
52901	53000	100	Curry	Clovis, Melrose, St. Vrain, Bellview	60901	61050	150	mixed	
53001	53050	50	Roosevelt	Portales, Kenna, Elida, Dora	61051	61150	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
53051	53100	50	mixed		61151	61200	50	Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister
53101	53200	100	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter	61201	61550	350	mixed	
53201	53250	50	Union	Clayton, Des Moines, Capulin, Folsom	61551	61650	100	Lea	Lovington, Tatum, Hobbs, Caprock
53251	53400	150	mixed		61651	61700	50	Curry	Clovis, Melrose, St. Vrain, Bellview
53401	53500	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	61701	61750	50	Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving
53501	53650	150	mixed		61751	61850	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
53651	53750	100	Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving	61851	61900	50	Union	Clayton, Des Moines, Capulin, Folsom
53751	53800	50	mixed		61901	62100	200	mixed	
53801	53850	50	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	62101	62150	50	San Juan	Farmington, Aztec, Shiprock, Bloomfield
53851	53950	100	Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister	62151	62450	300	mixed	
53951	54150	200	mixed		62451	62500	50	Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister
54151	54250	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	62501	62700	200	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs
54251	54350	100	mixed		62701	62800	100	mixed	
54351	54400	50	San Juan	Farmington, Aztec, Shiprock, Bloomfield	62801	62900	100	Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving
54401	54500	100	mixed		62901	62975	75	Roosevelt	Portales, Kenna, Elida, Dora
54501	54600	100	Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister	62976	63100	125	mixed	
54601	54700	100	mixed		63101	63250	150	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter
54701	54800	100	Curry	Clovis, Melrose, St. Vrain, Bellview	63251	63350	100	Eddy	Carlsbad, Artesia, Loving
54801	54950	150	mixed		63351	64000	650	mixed	
54951	55050	100	Bernalillo	Albuquerque and environs	64001	64050	50	Quay	Tucumcari, Nara Visa, House, McAlister
55051	55100	50	Hidalgo	Lordsburg, Animas, Valedon, Hachita	64051	64342	292	mixed	
55101	55150	50	mixed		64343	64384	42	McKinley	Gallup, Crownpoint, Bluewater, Thoreau
55151	55250	100	Chaves	Roswell, Lake Arthur, Hagerman, Dexter	64385	64500	116	mixed	
55251	55300	50	Lea	Lovington, Tatum, Hobbs, Caprock					
					Total: 64502				

Although the workload was successfully offloaded from Santa Fe to the counties, the resulting system was of no help to the peace officers Mr. Carter was thinking of in 1923 because there were too many disparate blocks of numbers assigned to any given location. To make matters worse, the same blocks were not even used year to year.

Distribution was to continue along the general lines of the 1928 plan for some years to come, and it would be almost another two decades before a well-formulated and executed county distribution system would be adopted.

The *Gallup Independent* for October 25, 1946, [p.1, c.5] reported the announcement by state prison warden Howell Gage, that starting in 1947, county number prefixes would be included on New Mexico's license plates. Santa Fe County, the location of the state's capital, would get number 1, whereas all the rest would be assigned numbers according to their rank in total sales of license plates. The sales numbers were based on the most recent year for which complete sales figures were available, i.e., those for 1945. [*Hobbs Daily News-Sun* December 3, 1947, p.1, c.3-4]

The later *Hobbs News-Sun* article was reporting that Mike Gallegos, director of the Motor Vehicle Division, had announced that the same system of assigning county numbers was to be used for 1948, again applying the most recent sales figures, which were now the figures for 1946. Not unexpectedly, the sales rankings had changed during the intervening year, and most of the county number assignments had to be changed.

Fortunately, someone realized that changing the county number prefixes each year was not only counterproductive, but doing so defeated the entire purpose of having them in the first place. Consequently, a decision was later made to leave the numbers permanently in the order they stood in 1948.

Nonetheless, from a historical standpoint, we are left with two different sets of county numbers to contend with, one for 1947 and another for 1948-1971. These are shown in the table below. [*Gallup Independent*, October 25, 1946, p.1, c.5; and *Hobbs Daily News-Sun*, December 3, 1947, p.1, c.3-4, respectively]

Los Alamos County, which was created in 1949 by carving out of portions of Sandoval and Santa Fe Counties [*Santa Rosa News*, March 18, 1949, p.1,c4], was added to the end of the list as number 32, without disrupting the other assignments. The numbers then stayed this way until they were discontinued entirely in 1972. (Truck plates kept the county prefixes through 1974.) Cibola County, created by lopping off the western portion of Valencia County, came into being in 1981 and was therefore never a part of the county prefix system.

## New Mexico County Number Prefixes

1947	1948-1971
1 Santa Fe	1 Santa Fe
2 Bernalillo	2 Bernalillo
3 Chaves	3 Eddy
4 Lea	4 Chaves
5 Curry	5 Curry
6 Doña Ana	6 Lea
7 Eddy	7 Doña Ana
8 Grant	8 Grant
9 Roosevelt	9 Colfax
10 Colfax	10 Quay
11 Quay	11 Roosevelt
12 McKinley	12 San Miguel
13 San Miguel	13 McKinley
14 Otero	14 Valencia
15 Valencia	15 Otero
16 Luna	16 San Juan
17 Union	17 Rio Arriba
18 San Juan	18 Union
19 Rio Arriba	19 Luna
20 Torrance	20 Taos
21 Taos	21 Sierra
22 Sierra	22 Torrance
23 De Baca	23 Hidalgo
24 Hidalgo	24 Guadalupe
25 Socorro	25 Socorro
26 Lincoln	26 Lincoln
27 Guadalupe	27 De Baca
28 Catron	28 Catron
29 Sandoval	29 Sandoval
30 Harding	30 Mora
31 Mora	31 Harding
	32 Los Alamos

One must not make the mistake, however, of thinking that a plate with a particular county prefix absolutely guarantees that it came from that county. Over the years there were instances when a county ran out of plates with its assigned prefix, then received and issued plates bearing the prefix of some other county.

Otero County, #15, was an example of this in 1957. The state had expected that county to need no more than 9,200 pairs of plates in 1957 (up from 8,270 in 1956), and therefore manufactured plates only up to #15-9200. But by July, over 9,000 sets had already been sold and the county was on the verge of running out. Meanwhile, Lea County (#6) found that it had received many more plates than it needed, and a stock of its extras was sent to Otero County. These began at number 6-30000, and though there appears to be no surviving record of how many from this series were issued, it probably amounted to at least a thousand, and perhaps as many as two thousand pairs. [*El Paso Herald-Post* (Texas), July 19, 1957, p. 33, c. 2; and *El Paso Herald-Post* (Texas), November 28, 1957, p. 15, c. 1]

Otero County wasn't the only place that ran short. A month later neighboring Doña Ana County (#7) ran out and also looked to Lea County for replenishment. No mention was made of the quantity of plates involved, but it was undoubtedly significant in view of the fact that the supply of #7 plates was exhausted just two-thirds of the way through the year. [*Las Cruces Sun-News*, August 30, 1957, p.4, c.1]

As was seen above, one of the consequences of decentralized distribution of license plates was that some distribution centers ran out of plates, and had to acquire additional plates from other offices. By the same token, some centers ended up with more plates than were needed, and the extras ended up not getting used at all. The result was that there were often significant numbers of leftover unissued plates with numbers lower than some plates issued in other offices. In other words, the highest plate number issued is not an accurate count of the total number of vehicles registered.

### **Out-of-County by Choice**

Aside from the fact that some counties supplemented their inventories with plates that were prefixed and intended for other counties, there was nothing that prohibited a vehicle owner from purchasing plates at any county distribution center that suited him (or her). As such, it was not entirely unusual for people living in the outer reaches of one county to buy plates at a much closer distribution point in an adjacent county. And anyone who happened to be traveling within the state could stop at any convenient plate sales office to pick up tags, further clouding the meaning of the county prefix thereon.

### **Stacked County Number Prefixes**

On the 12-inch plates introduced nationwide in 1956, those counties with two digit numbers had space for only four digits to the right of the Zia symbol, allowing for at most 9,999 plates in each county. This was fine until some of those counties reached 10,000 or more registrations, a condition which first occurred in 1957. Among the earliest to reach this milestone were counties 16 and 17 (San Juan and Rio Arriba, respectively).

The solution was to reduce the size of the two county number digits and stack them vertically at the left side. This freed up space for one more digit, allowing up to 100,000 registration numbers in each of the respective counties before the plates would again run out of room. [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, June 19, 1957, p.4, c.2]

A side effect of this concept was that it was necessary to eliminate the extra "57" that was in the lower left corner of those plates without a stacked county number. As far as is known, in this initial year at least, passenger car

plates in the affected counties used side-by-side county number digits for serial numbers up through 9999, then stacked the county digits only on plates numbered 10000 and higher. (Truck plates with stacked county prefixes are known to exist with serials lower than 10000.)

### **Abandonment of the County Prefix System**

Registrations continued to increase until their numbers finally overwhelmed both the ability of a 12-inch-long license plate to hold a big enough number, and the capability of even the decentralized distribution system to handle hundreds of thousands of renewals during the Christmas holiday season.

The first problem was solved by the abandonment of the county prefix system at the end of 1971 for passenger cars, and for trucks at the end of 1974. A 3-letter, 3-numeral format (e.g., ABC-123) was introduced for the 1972 passenger car plates, followed in 1975 by a 2-letter, 4-numeral configuration for truck plates (e.g., AB-1234). Whereas an all-numeric 6-digit license plate can supply only one million unique numbers, the new alphanumeric formats could theoretically support as many as 17,576,000 combinations for cars, and 6,760,000 for trucks.

In practice, the actual number of available combinations was somewhat reduced since New Mexico in most years never employed any of the letters I, O, Q, U, or V on its regular-issue plates. (These letters were still available on vanity plates, though.) Additionally, certain permutations which formed words or letter combinations which were considered objectionable have been skipped over as well.

The number of available truck plate serial combinations was further reduced by omissions made necessary by conflicts with letter pairs reserved for use on certain other non-passenger plates. The omitted combinations included, but were not limited to, the following:

CB (Commercial Bus), DE (Driver Education), DL (Dealer),  
DM (Dealer Manufacturer), FT (Freight Trailer), IR (Interstate),  
PR (Prorate truck), PT (Prorate Trailer), SB (School Bus),  
TA-TZ (Trailer), WR (Wrecker).

Nonetheless, the total number of available unique serial numbers was so vast that the state would not be in danger of running out for decades to come.

The end-of-year workload problem wasn't solved until April 1982, when the state introduced a staggered registration system. With this method the plate's renewal sticker bears not just an expiration year, but an expiration month as well. The plate expires the following year, and in the same month as the registration was initially made, spreading the Motor Vehicle Division's workload out fairly evenly over the entire year.

## **County Name Stickers**

From about 1976 to 2001, New Mexico's license plates were manufactured with a  $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 5" depression centered on the top edge of the plate. Within this "sticker box" was placed a self-adhesive label bearing the name of the county in which the plate was issued. Apparently there was no legal requirement that the stickers be displayed, however, and often they were not. In effect, the county name label served no purpose other than to dress up the appearance of the tag.

Ultimately, the sticker box was done away with, but county-name stickers can occasionally still be obtained at some Motor Vehicle Division field offices.

For many years the county names on these stickers were printed in block letters but in more recent times an "italics" style font was used.

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/countyscheme.htm>



# Enabling Legislation

Reproduced in the following several chapters, in chronological order, are some of the key laws and ordinances which governed early New Mexico license plates. They were transcribed from the originals through the use of optical character recognition (OCR) software, which is inherently susceptible to reproduction errors, the nature and severity of which are dependent upon the quality of the original documents. All of these transcriptions, however, were carefully proofread against the originals and necessary corrections made. I believe, therefore, that the transcriptions are highly accurate, and any errors that might be found are likely limited to a few errant characters or punctuation marks here and there.

Not every applicable law is reproduced here. As time went by, the legislature found itself constantly playing catch-up with both the evolving technology of motor vehicles, and the deviant conduct of ne'er-do-wells who were forever finding loopholes to exploit. The 1929 Laws, for example, contain much interesting information but are quite voluminous, and we have elected not to include them, or any of the later, even lengthier statutes.

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# **1910 ALBUQUERQUE**

## **REVISED ORDINANCES CHAPTER 5. AUTOMOBILES AND MOTOR-CYCLES.**

- Section 44. Drivers to Pay License.**
- Section 45. Examination, How Made.**
- Section 46. Machine to Have Number.**
- Section 47. Lights on Motor-Cycles.**
- Section 48. Brakes Required.**
- Section 49. Lights Alter Sunset.**
- Section 50. Speed Limited.**
- Section 51. License May Be Revoked.**
- Section 52. Shall Turn to the Right.**
- Section 53. Penalty For Not Having License.**
- Section 54. Penalty For Machine Not Licensed.**

### **SECTION 44. — DRIVERS TO PAY LICENSE.**

All drivers or operators of automobiles, motor-cycles and similar and kindred conveyances propelled by steam, gasoline or electricity or similar power shall before they shall proceed to run, drive or operate any of the above described vehicles in the City of Albuquerque, N.M., pay an annual license fee of \$1.00 to the City Clerk, together with a fee of fifty cents for issuing the said license, after said license is granted by the City Council. (Ord. 432, Sec. 1.)

### **SECTION 45. — EXAMINATION — HOW MADE.**

Whenever any person shall apply for a license to drive, run or operate any of the above mentioned vehicles, the Mayor shall at once appoint a committee of at least two persons, who are known to be qualified to drive, run or operate such machines, to examine the applicant as to his or her qualifications therefor, and the report of said committee shall be accepted as evidence of the applicant's qualifications, but the City Council shall require such further evidence as may appear to be necessary before granting said license. Provided, the running, driving or operating any machine by a person so licensed, if the said vehicle is not numbered as hereinafter provided, shall be deemed sufficient cause to revoke the said driver's license.

And the driving of a numbered automobile, motorcycle or other vehicle named herein by an unlicensed person shall be sufficient cause for revoking any license of such machine or vehicle. (Ord. 432, Sec. 2.)

### **SECTION 46. — MACHINE TO HAVE NUMBER.**

All automobiles or other four-wheeled vehicles or conveyances propelled by

steam; gasoline or electricity, or similar power, shall have displayed upon or attached to the rear end or axle thereof, in plain view, a number in plain, legible figures, three inches in height. The said numbers shall be issued by the City Clerk upon the payment of a license fee of \$1.50, together with a fee of 50 cents for issuing the said license, but this license when so issued shall serve as a permanent permit for that machine. Provided, that the City Clerk shall not issue any such numbers or license to a person under suspension as provided in Section 45. (Ord. 432, Sec. 3.)

#### **SECTION 47. — LIGHTS ON MOTOR-CYCLES.**

All motor-cycles or similar vehicles propelled by steam, gasoline, electricity or like power, shall have displayed on the rear of the seat thereof, a plain, legible number, one inch in height, which shall be furnished by the City Clerk, upon the same conditions as provided for numbers in Section 46 hereof. And all such vehicles shall, after sunset, carry a light in front. (Ord. 432, Sec. 4.)

#### **SECTION 48. — BRAKES REQUIRED.**

All of the vehicles named in this chapter shall be provided with a suitable brake or other device for stopping quickly, and when left standing must be so secured that the machine can not possibly start until the power is applied by the driver or operator thereof. (Ord. 432, Sec. 5.)

#### **SECTION 49. — LIGHTS AFTER SUNSET.**

All vehicles mentioned in Section 46 shall be required, after sunset, to display two white lights in front and one red light on the rear, also one white light in the rear, so arranged that it will illuminate the number of the machine. These lights to be kept burning as long as the machine or vehicle is upon the streets, whether running or standing. (Ord. 432, Sec. 6.)

#### **SECTION 50. — SPEED LIMITED.**

The running speed of the vehicles and conveyances mentioned in this chapter, within the city limits, shall be under the control and regulation of the police department of this City, according to the condition of the traffic. Provided, that the maximum speed within the City limits shall not exceed ten miles per hour, and shall not exceed five miles per hour in turning corners, and the license of any person may be revoked whenever they shall fail or refuse to comply with the orders of the department, or shall violate the speed limit herein provided, and the license of the car may also be annulled; and excessive speed, on the part of any driver or operator after having been once warned, shall be punished by a fine of not less than one nor more than twenty-five dollars for the first offense, and for the second offense shall be fined not less than twenty nor more than fifty dollars, and for the third offense, said latter fine, and the license of both driver and machine shall be revoked. (Ord. 432, Sec. 7.)

**SECTION 51. — LICENSE MAY BE REVOKED.**

Any license revoked for cause shall not be restored until after investigation by the police committee, who shall, after due consideration of the case, report their findings to the City Council for final action, and the City Council shall have the right to permanently withdraw the license from any person, if, in their opinion, the public safety requires such action. (Ord. 432, Sec. 8.)

**SECTION 52. — SHALL TURN TO THE RIGHT.**

It shall be the duty of every person in charge of any of the vehicles mentioned in this chapter, at all times when practical, to keep to the right of the center of the street and when meeting any other vehicle or pedestrian, or any person riding or driving any horse or other animal, to turn to the right. (Ord. 432, Sec. 9.)

**SECTION 53. — PENALTY FOR NOT HAVING LICENSE.**

That any person who shall run, drive or operate any automobile, motor-cycle or similar or kindred conveyance propelled by steam, gasoline or electricity or similar power, without first having secured a license so to do, as provided for in this chapter, shall, in addition to the penalties provided for in this chapter, be fined in any sum not less than ten dollars, nor more than twenty-five dollars, and each day that any such person shall run, drive or operate any such machine without such license shall constitute a separate offense. (Ord. 441, Sec. 1.)

**SECTION 54. — PENALTY FOR MACHINE NOT LICENSED.**

Any person who shall run, drive or operate any of the conveyances mentioned in Section No. 44, which has not been properly licensed as provided for herein, shall be liable to the same penalties as those prescribed in the foregoing section hereof. (Ord. 441, Sec. 2.)

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# **1910 Las Vegas**

Effective August 13, 1910

## **ORDINANCE NO. 349**

### **An ordinance concerning the licensing of automobiles and other motor vehicles, regulating the speed thereof, and providing for the numbering, equipment and operation of the same.**

Be it ordained by the city council of the City of Las Vegas:

**Sec. 1.** That it shall be unlawful to use or operate any automobile or motor vehicle within the corporate limits of the City of Las Vegas, except under and by virtue of the authority of a license as hereinafter provided, and provided, that visiting automobiles may be used and operated subject to all the provisions of this ordinance, save and except that as visitors they shall not be required to take out a license until after thirty days from the time of their arrival in the city.

**Sec. 2.** The license for the use and operation of automobiles and other motor vehicles shall be issued in the same manner as other licenses, and the fee for such license shall be the sum of five dollars per year; shall be paid to the city clerk, and shall authorize the use and operation of the automobile or other motor vehicle for a period of one year from the date of the issuance thereof. Owners shall file name and address, as well as description of the machine, with the city clerk, at the time of the application for license. The license certificate shall bear a number assigned by the clerk, which shall be the same as the number of the automobile or other motor vehicle, as hereinafter provided, and said license shall not be transferrable.

**Sec. 3** Upon payment of the fee as provided in Section 2, hereof, the city clerk shall issue to the owner of the automobile or other motor vehicle, a tag bearing a number the same as that of the license certificate; said tag bearing the number aforesaid shall be attached in a conspicuous place in the rear of the machine, or painted thereon at expense of the owner, if it is unpracticable to attach the tag.

**Sec. 4** Any person operating an automobile or other motor vehicle within the limits of the city of Las Vegas must be at least sixteen years of age. And no person shall operate or drive any automobile or other motor vehicle within the limits of said city while he is in an intoxicated condition or in any degree under the influence of liquor. The license of any person violating this section shall be subject to immediate revocation in addition to the penalty hereinafter provided.

**Sec. 5.** No operator shall drive a machine beyond and at a greater speed limit than at the rate of ten miles per hour within the business district of the city, and than at the rate of fifteen miles per hour in any other part of the city. The business district of the city for the purpose of this ordinance shall be considered to be those streets

and portions of streets within the fire limits and in addition thereto those streets and portions of streets traversed by the street car line and one block in either direction on every street intersecting the streets and portions of streets traversed by the said street car line.

**Sec. 6.** No part of machine or motor shall be kept running when the automobile or motor vehicle is standing in the street without an attendant. Owners must carry on all machines at all times a gong, bell or horn and at night at least three lamps. The gong, bell or horn must be used for signalling to give warning of approach in order to avoid accidents or collisions. Lamps shall be so placed that light from them will not be obstructed by any part of the machine, and the said lamps must be kept lighted at all times the machine is in use from 45 minutes after sunset and thereafter until daylight. One lamp shall be so attached to the rear of the machine and so adjusted as to illuminate clearly the registered number. Provided that motor cycles shall carry only two lamps, one in front and one in the rear, the latter so adjusted as to illuminate the license tag.

**Sec. 7.** Any person running a machine, and all conveyances and vehicles of whatever kind or description, within the limits of the city of Las Vegas shall keep to the right hand side of the street, and shall turn to the left in overtaking and passing any person or conveyance.

**Sec. 8.** The use of the word "machine" herein shall be construed to mean and refer to automobiles and other motor vehicles.

**Sec. 9.** Any person, firm or corporation, violating, neglecting or refusing to comply with the provisions of this ordinance shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction thereof shall be fined not more than fifty dollars nor less than ten dollars for each and every offense.

**Sec. 10.** This ordinance shall be in full force and effect from and after its passage and publication as required by law.

Enacted this 13th day of [August], A.D., 1910.

Approved: K.D. GOODALL, Mayor.

Attest: CHAS. TAMME, Clerk.



## **1910 Santa Fe Municipal Ordinance**

(**Note:** The text of this ordinance was published in “Revised Ordinances of Santa Fe, New Mexico,” Revised and Compiled by Charles R. Easley, City Attorney, July, 1911, p. 84, but the ordinance itself is from November 1, 1910.)

### **AUTOMOBILES.**

Sec. 279. — Sub-Sec. 1. That it shall be unlawful to use or to operate any automobile or motor vehicle within the corporate limits of the City of Santa Fe excepting under and by virtue of the authority of a license, as hereinafter provided.

Sub-Sec. 2. The owners of any automobile or automobiles shall pay annually a road license for each of said vehicles the sum of \$8.00; the owners of motor bicycles, motor cycles and other conveyances of like nature shall pay an annual road license for each of such vehicles the sum of \$4.00; and the owners of bicycles shall pay annually a road license for each bicycle the sum of \$1.00.

Sub-Sec. 3. That all present owners shall within ten (10) days from the 1st day of November, 1910, and all future owners shall within ten (10) days after the receipt of their automobiles, motor cycles, or other motor vehicle, or within ten days after the 1st day of January of each year thereafter file application with the clerk of the City of Santa Fe for such license, and shall in such application specify the type (automobile, motor cycle, etc.) kind (gasoline, steam, electric, etc.) and make (factory name) of motor vehicle for which license is sought, giving the factory number of same.

Sub-Sec. 4. That upon the receipt of such application, properly signed by the applicant, under oath, and accompanied by the necessary fee provided for in Sub-Section 2 of this ordinance, it shall be the duty of the clerk of the City of Santa Fe to issue unto said applicant a license bearing a number. Said license shall expire with the calendar year in which the same is issued

Sub-Sec. 5. Upon receipt of such license it shall be the duty of the applicant or owner of such automobile or other motor vehicle to cause to be placed, at his own expense, upon his car in conspicuous places, front and rear, opposite rear lamp, in large numbers, no less than three inches in height, the corresponding number of such license with “S. F.”

Sub-Sec. 6. That all persons employed as chauffeurs shall pay an occupation license in the sum of two dollars per annum; said license to be procured in the same manner as heretofore provided for the procuring of road licenses for automobiles, motor cycles and other motor vehicles, and shall expire with the calendar year.

Sub-Sec. 7. That all persons before they shall be legally qualified to operate any automobile, motor cycle, or other motor vehicle in the City of Santa Fe shall satisfactorily pass an examination before the board of examiners appointed by the mayor for such purpose, touching their qualifications and knowledge of the automobiles, motor cycles or other motor vehicles sought to be operated.

Sub-Sec. 8. That such persons referred to in Sub-Section 7 of this ordinance

shall, prior to taking such examination, file their applications with the secretary of the board of examiners, accompanying same with their examination fee in the sum of two dollars, and in such application specify the type, kind and make of automobile, motor cycle or other motor vehicle sought to be operated: *Provided*, That the applications of persons under the age of 18 years shall not be considered by said board.

Sub-Sec. 9. That upon the passing of the examination as provided for in Sub-Section 7 of this ordinance, the president and secretary of the board of examiners shall furnish such applicant with a certificate of qualification and shall immediately thereafter notify the city clerk of the issuance of such certificate which shall be renewed annually upon the payment of a fee of two (\$2.00) dollars, and shall expire with the calendar year.

Sub-Sec. 10. That the maximum speed of all automobiles, motor cycles, motor vehicles and all other vehicles within the corporate limits of the City of Santa Fe shall be twelve (12) miles per hour, except that on the streets surrounding the plaza the maximum speed shall be eight (8) miles per hour and in rounding corners and passing through San Francisco street between the plaza and Don Gaspar avenue the maximum speed shall be four (4) miles per hour. No automobile, motor cycle, or other motor vehicle shall be left standing on the street with the engine running.

Sub-Sec. 11. That every automobile, motor cycle, and every other motor vehicle shall be equipped with a horn, siren or whistle, which shall be sounded when rounding corners or crossing any streets or when passing any vehicle from the rear; every automobile or other motor vehicle, except motor cycles shall be equipped with three lights, two in front and one in rear — rear light red. Motor cycles shall be equipped with one front light, all other vehicles shall be equipped with a front light. All lights shall be lighted within forty-five minutes after sunset and until daylight.

Sub-Sec. 12. That all automobiles, or other four wheeled motor vehicles shall be equipped with some non-skidding device when the streets are slippery.

Sub-Sec. 13. That none of the provisions of this ordinance, excepting those contained in Sub-Sections 10, 11 and 12 shall apply to visiting automobiles, motor cycles or other motor vehicles, or owners, drivers, or chauffeurs thereof, until ten (10) days after their arrival within the City of Santa Fe. Then they shall be required to comply with all the provisions hereof, except the license fee for such automobiles shall be two dollars per quarter, payable quarterly, instead of eight dollars per calendar year.

Sub-Sec. 14. That any person violating the provisions of this ordinance, upon conviction thereof in the court of the police magistrate, shall be fined for the first offense not to exceed ten (\$10.00) dollars; for the second offense not less than ten (\$10.00) dollars nor more than twenty-five (\$25.00) dollars; for the third offense not less than twenty-five (\$25.00) dollars nor more than one hundred (\$100.00) dollars, or the revoking of all rights granted under any of the provisions of this ordinance, or both.

Sub-Sec. 15. That all examination fees, license fees and fines collected under this ordinance shall be turned over to the city clerk of the City of Santa Fe and be immediately placed in the city road fund.

# **1911 RATON**

## **ORDINANCE NO. 169**

Effective February 7, 1911

### **Relating to Automobiles and Motor-Cycles.**

Be it ordained by the Council of the City of Raton:

Section 1. All drivers or operators of automobiles, motor-cycles and similar and kindred conveyances propelled by steam, gasoline or electricity or similar power shall before they shall proceed to run, drive or operate any of the above described vehicles in the City of Raton, N.M., pay an annual license fee of \$1.00 to the City Clerk, together with a fee of fifty cents for issuing the said license, after said license is granted by City Council.

Section 2. Whenever any person shall apply for a license to drive, run or operate any of the above mentioned vehicles, the Mayor shall at once appoint a committee of at least two persons who are known to be qualified to run, drive or operate such machines, to examine the applicant as to his or her qualifications therefor, and the report of said committee shall be accepted as evidence of the applicant's qualifications, but the City Council shall require such further evidence as may appear to be necessary before granting said license. Provided, the running, driving or operating any machine by a person so licensed, if the said vehicle is not numbered as hereinafter provided, shall be deemed sufficient cause to revoke the said driver's license. And the driving of a numbered automobile, motorcycle or other vehicle named herein by an unlicensed person shall be sufficient cause for revoking any license of such machine or vehicle.

Section 3. All automobiles or other four-wheeled vehicles or conveyances propelled by steam, gasoline or electricity, or similar power, shall have displayed upon or attached to the rear end or axle thereof, in plain view, a number in plain, legible figures, three inches in height. The said numbers shall be issued by the City Clerk upon the payment of a license fee of \$4.50, together with a fee of fifty cents for issuing the said license, but this license when so issued shall serve as a permanent permit for that machine. Provided, that the City Clerk shall not issue any such numbers or license to a person under suspension as provided in Section 2.

Section 4. All motor-cycles or similar vehicles propelled by steam, gasoline, electricity or like power, shall have displayed on the rear of the seat thereof, a plain, legible number, one inch in height, which shall be furnished by the City Clerk, upon the same conditions as provided for numbers in Section 3 hereof. And all such vehicles shall, after sunset, carry a light in front.

Section 5. All of the vehicles named in this chapter shall be provided with a suitable brake or other device for stopping quickly, and when left standing must be so secured that until the power is applied by the driver or operator the machine could not possibly start.

Section 6. All vehicles mentioned in Section 3 shall be required, after sunset, to display two white lights in front and one red light on the rear, also one white light in the rear, so arranged that it will illuminate the number of the machine. These lights to be kept burning as long as the machine or vehicle is upon the streets, whether running or standing.

Section 7. The running speed of the vehicles and conveyances mentioned in this chapter, within the city limits, shall be under the control and regulation of the police department of the City, according to the condition of the traffic. Provided, that the maximum speed within the city limits shall not exceed ten miles per hour, and shall not exceed five miles per hour in turning corners, and the license of any person may be revoked whenever they shall fail or refuse to comply with the orders of the department, or shall violate the speed limit herein provided, and the license of the car also may also be annulled; and excessive speed, on the part of any driver or operator after having been once warned, shall be punished by a fine of not less than one nor more than twenty-five dollars for the first offense, and for the second offense shall be fined not less than twenty nor more than fifty dollars, and for the third offense, said latter fine, and the license of both driver and machine shall be revoked.

Section 8. Any license revoked for cause shall not be restored until after investigation by the police committee, who shall, after due consideration of the case, report their findings to the City Council for final action, and the City Council shall have the right to permanently withdraw the license from any person, if, in their opinion, the public safety requires such action.

Section 9. It shall be the duty of every person in charge of any of the vehicles mentioned in this chapter, at all times when practical, to keep to the right of the center of the street and when meeting any other vehicles or pedestrian, or any person riding or driving any horse or other animal, to turn to the right.

Section 10. That any person who shall run, drive or operate any automobile, motor-cycle or similar or kindred conveyance propelled by steam, gasoline or electricity or similar power, without first having secured a license so to do, as provided for in this chapter, shall, in addition to the penalties provided for in this chapter, be fined in any sum not less than ten dollars, nor more than twenty-five dollars, and each day that any such person shall run, drive or operate any such machine without such license shall constitute a separate offense.

Section 11. Any person who shall run, drive or operate any of the conveyances mentioned in Section 1, which has not been properly licensed as provided for herein, shall be liable to the same penalties as those prescribed in the foregoing section hereof.

Section 12. All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with this ordinance are hereby repealed.

Section 13. This ordinance shall be in force and take effect five days after its passage and publication.

[Passed January 31, 1911; Published in the *Raton Daily Range* on February 1 and February 2, 1911.]

# 1912 Laws of New Mexico

## CHAPTER 28

### AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR STATE LICENSE ON AUTOMOBILES.

*Amend. S.B. No. 164; Approved June 8, 1912.*

*Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of New Mexico:*

#### **Automobiles; State License Required — Exclusive — Tourists Exempt. Proviso.**

Section 1. No person or persons, firm or corporation owning an automobile in this state shall be permitted to maintain or operate the same without first obtaining a state license as hereinafter provided. Such license shall be granted by the Secretary of State upon application therefor and the payment of the fees as herein specified, and shall be co-extensive with the state. Such licenses shall be numbered consecutively, and a record thereof kept, showing in each instance the name and address of the person to whom such license is granted. In addition to the license the Secretary of State shall furnish to the licensee one metal tag or plate bearing the initials 'N. M.' and the number corresponding to that of the license. Such tag or plate shall be securely attached to a conspicuous place on the rear end of such automobile. A duplicate of any such tag or plate may be issued by the Secretary of State to the person to whom the original was issued, upon payment of a fee of one dollar.

The owner of an automobile licensed under this Act shall not be required to pay any other or additional license in any incorporated city, town or village in the State other than that in which such owner resides. Tourists passing through the state shall not be required to pay the license prescribed by this act unless they shall remain within the state for more than sixty days.

#### **Automobiles; Operating Without or Destroying Evidence of License — Misdemeanor.**

Sec. 2. Any person who shall maintain or operate an automobile without a tag or plate affixed thereto as herein provided, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction thereof shall be fined not less than twenty (20) nor more than one hundred (100) dollars.

Any person other than the owner of an automobile licenses [license] under this Act who shall deface or destroy any such tag or plate, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction thereof shall be fined not less than five (5) nor more than fifty (50) dollars.

### **License Fee — Annual and Renewal — Amount — Application of Fund.**

Sec. 3. The fee for a license under this Act shall be ten (10) dollars annually and shall be paid for each automobile by the owner thereof, and such license fee shall be in addition to the ordinary property tax. Upon payment of said fee of ten (10) dollars, the Secretary of State shall annually, within thirty (30) days from and after the first day of November, issue to such owner a renewal certificate which shall bear the same number as the original license. All license fees and the renewals thereof shall be paid to the Secretary of State on or before the first day of October in each year, and the said Secretary of State shall pay same over to the State Treasurer, who shall credit the amount thereof to the State Road Fund. PROVIDED: that an additional fee of one (1) dollar for the issuance of any such license and of fifty (50) cents for the annual renewal thereof shall be collected from each owner by the said Secretary of State. PROVIDED FURTHER: the said fee of one (1) dollar and the said renewal fee of fifty (50) cents, together with all fees hereinbefore provided for and required to be paid for duplicates of tags or plates issued by the Secretary of State, and collected by him, shall be used for the purpose of defraying the expenses incident to the administration of this Act in the office of said Secretary of State, and any surplus at the end of the fiscal year shall be turned over to the State Treasurer and credited to said Road Fund.

### **Evidence — What is Prima Facie of Ownership.**

Sec. 4. In any controversy respecting the identity or ownership or control of an automobile, the number borne by it shall be prima facie evidence that it was owned and operated by the person to whom the license therefor was issued. If a license for an automobile shall be issued to any person other than the owner, it shall be invalid and such automobile shall be deemed to be maintained and operated without a license.

### **Automobiles; Failure to Pay License Fee — misdemeanor.**

Sec. 5. Any owner of an automobile who shall fail to pay the fees as required by this Act shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction thereof shall be fined in any sum not less than twenty (20) nor more than one hundred (100) dollars.

### **Automobiles — County Assessors Furnish List Owners.**

Sec. 6. It shall be the duty of the Assessor of each county to report to the Secretary of State on or before the first of September in each year, on blanks to be prepared and furnished by the Secretary of State, the names of the owners of all automobiles listed by him in his county for taxation.

# 1913 LAWS OF NEW MEXICO.

## CHAPTER 19.

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR STATE LICENSE ON MOTOR VEHICLES PROVIDING FOR THE REGISTRATION, AND REGULATING THE OPERATION, USE AND SPEED THEREOF, PRESCRIBING PENALTIES AND LIABILITIES FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE ACT, AND REPEALING CHAPTER 28, LAWS OF 1912. *Amend. S.B. No. 16; Approved March 11, 1913.* [The law became effective March 15, 1913.]

*Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of New Mexico:*

### **Motor Vehicle Defined.**

Section 1. The term "Motor Vehicle" as used in this Act, except where otherwise expressly provided, shall include all vehicles propelled by any power other than muscular power, except traction engines, road rollers, fire wagons and engines, police patrol wagons, ambulances and such other vehicles as run only upon rails or tracks.

### **Application for License; Rating Motive Power.**

Sec. 2. Every owner of a motor vehicle which shall be operated or driven upon the public highways of this State shall, except as otherwise expressly herein provided, cause to be filed, by mail or otherwise, in the office of the Secretary of State an application for registration on a blank to be furnished by the Secretary of State for that purpose, said application containing a brief description of the motor vehicle to be registered, including the name and factory number, the character and the amount of motive power, stated in figures of horse power in accordance with the rating established by the Association of American Licensed Automobile Manufacturers, also the name and address of the owner of such motor vehicle.

### **Filing Application; Registration of Motor Vehicle; Record Public.**

Sec. 3. Upon receipt of an application for registration of a motor vehicle, as provided in section 2, the Secretary of State shall file such application in his office and register such motor vehicle with the name and address of the owner, together with the facts stated in such application, in a book or index to be kept for the purpose, under the distinctive number assigned to such motor vehicle by the Secretary of State. Such records, books or index, shall be open to public inspection during reasonable business hours.

### **Fees, Schedule; Term of Licenses.**

Sec. 4. The following fees shall be paid to the Secretary of State upon the registration or re-registration of a motor vehicle in accordance with the provisions of this Act:

Less than twelve horse power	\$ 2.00
Twelve horse power and less than twenty horse power	4.00
Twenty horse power and less than thirty horse power	6.00
Thirty horse power and less than forty horse power	8.00

Forty horse power and less than fifty horse power	10.00
Fifty horse power or more	12.00

Such fees shall be for annual registration, and all licenses shall expire on the thirty-first day of December of each year, provided that any application received and registered after July first of any year shall pay one-half of the fee as fixed by this Act.

**Number Plate; Furnished Free; How Displayed; Duplicate; Renewal of Registration.**

Sec. 5. Upon the filing of an application and the payment of the fees herein provided, the Secretary of State shall assign to such motor vehicle a distinctive number and, without additional expense to the applicant, issue and deliver to the owner a certificate of registration in such form as the Secretary of State may prescribe, and one number plate. Such number plate shall be of metal and at least five inches wide, and not less than ten inches in length, on which there shall be the initials N.M. and the distinctive number assigned to the vehicle. Such number shall be conspicuously displayed on the rear of each vehicle. In the event of loss, mutilation or destruction of any certificate or number plate, the owner may obtain a duplicate from the Secretary of State by filing an affidavit showing such fact and the payment of a fee of one dollar. Such registration shall be renewed annually in the same manner and on the payment of the same fee as for original registration, such renewal to take effect on the first day of January of each year. The Secretary of State shall adopt a different color each year for the number plate.

**Dealer's License, Fee.**

Sec. 6. Every person, firm, association or corporation, manufacturing or dealing in motor vehicles may, instead of registering each vehicle, apply for a dealer's license, which shall be in form as provided by the Secretary of State and shall be a permit allowing the manufacturer or dealer to drive or exhibit motor vehicles on the streets or highways. Such manufacturer or dealer shall have attached to the rear of each vehicle a plate or card of the same size as the number plate, bearing the name of the person, firm or corporation, and the word DEALER. The fee for a dealer's license shall be twelve (\$12.00) dollars per annum. Nothing in this section shall be construed to apply to a motor vehicle operated by a manufacturer or dealer for private use, or for hire.

**Non-residents; Law Applies After Stay of Sixty Days.**

Sec. 7. The provisions of this Act, relative to registration and the display of registration numbers, shall not apply to a motor vehicle owned by a non-resident of this State, provided such vehicle bears the number and initials of some other State and does not remain in this State more than sixty days.

**Only State License Required; City Registration — Fee Limited.**

Sec. 8. No owner of a motor vehicle who shall have obtained a number and registration, as provided in this Act, shall be required to obtain any other certificate to use or operate such motor vehicle on any of the public highways of this State, and no motor vehicle shall bear any other number or license other than as provided for in this Act. Provided incorporated cities, towns and villages may pass ordinances providing regulations for the operation of motor vehicles, and may require owners residents of



such cities, towns and villages to register their state numbers in the office of the city, town, or village clerk, but such registration fee shall not exceed fifty cents per annum.

**Sale of Motor Vehicle; Notice to Secretary of State; License Transferred.**

Sec. 9. Upon the sale or transfer of a motor vehicle, registered in accordance with this Act, the vendor shall immediately give notice thereof, with the name and residence of the vendee, to the Secretary of State. Upon the filing of such statement, and the payment of a fee of one dollar by the vendee, the Secretary of State shall note such change of ownership upon the registration book or index, and the vendee shall be allowed to use such license and number until expiration.

**Brakes, Lights, Signals; Passing Motors or Animals.**

Sec. 10. Every motor vehicle operated or driven upon the streets or public highways of this State shall be provided with adequate brakes in good working order, and sufficient to control such vehicle at all times, and a suitable bell, horn, other signaling device, and shall during the period from one-half hour after sunset to one-half hour before sunrise display at least two lighted lamps on the front, and one on the rear of such vehicle. Every person operating or driving a motor vehicle on the public highways shall also, when approaching an intersection or cross road, or when passing another motor or other vehicle, or herd of cattle, sheep, goats, horses or other animals slow down to at least fifteen miles per hour, and shall signal in such manner as to give warning of his approach.

**Meeting and Passing; Stop when Signaled; Precautions.**

Sec. 11. A person operating or driving a motor vehicle shall on signal by raising the hand, from a person riding, leading or driving a horse or horses or other animals, bring such motor vehicle to a stop, and if traveling in the opposite direction remain stationary so long as may be reasonable to allow such person to pass, and if traveling in the same direction use reasonable caution in passing.

**Meeting and Passing; Turn to the Right.**

Sec. 12. Whenever a person driving or operating a motor vehicle shall meet in a public highway any other vehicle, such person shall turn to the right of the center of the road a reasonable distance so as to permit passing without interference. Whenever any such person operating a motor vehicle shall overtake any other vehicle, he shall pass such vehicle on the left-hand side. Any person operating a motor vehicle shall, at the intersection of public highways, keep to the right of the intersection of the centers of such highways when turning to the right and pass to the right of such intersection when turning to the left.

**Operating Without License, While Intoxicated or When Under Age; Violation of Act, Penalty,**

Sec. 13. Any person who shall operate a motor vehicle while in an intoxicated condition, or any owner of a motor vehicle who shall permit any person under the age of fourteen years to operate any motor vehicle, or any person who shall operate a motor vehicle without a number or license as provided for in this Act, or who shall violate any other provisions of this Act for which no punishment has been provided, upon conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine of not less than Twenty-Five dollars nor

more than One Hundred Dollars, or by imprisonment for not less than thirty or more than ninety days, or both.

**[Accidents — Driver Must Leave Address, Assist Injured and Report to Officers.]**

Any person operating a motor vehicle by which injury is caused accidentally or otherwise to any person, who shall fail to stop and tender assistance to such injured person, or to give his name, residence and the number of his motor vehicle to the person injured thereby, or who shall fail to report such accident or injury to the nearest police officer or magistrate, upon conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine not exceeding Five Hundred Dollars, or by imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or both.

**[False Statement to Secure License; Penalty.]**

Any person who shall wilfully make any false statement in order to secure a license such as is provided for in this Act, upon conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine not exceeding One Hundred Dollars, or by imprisonment nor [not] exceeding ninety days, or both.

**Precautions by Operators; Liability for Damages to Injured.**

Sec. 14. Any person operating, owning or controlling a motor vehicle running on, along or across public roads, streets, alleys, highways or places much used for travel, shall use the highest degree of care that a very careful person would use under like or similar circumstances to prevent injury or death to persons on or traveling over such public roads, streets, alleys, highways or places used for travel. Any owner, operator, or person in control of such motor vehicle failing to use such degree of care shall be liable for damages to a person injured by failure of the owner, operator or person in control of a motor vehicle, to use such degree of care, and in case of death of the injured party, then damages may be recovered, as now provided or may hereafter be provided by law, unless the injury or death is caused by the negligence of the injured or deceased person contributing thereto.

**Disposition of Fees; Mail Cars Exempt—Drivers Subject to Law.**

Sec. 15. All fees provided for herein to be paid to the Secretary of State, less the cost of the administration of this Act, shall be paid by the Secretary of State to the State Treasurer for the benefit of the State Highway Fund, and shall be used by the State Highway Commission upon the public highways, giving preference to automobile routes. Provided, motor vehicles used exclusively on mail lines, for carrying the mails, shall not be required to have license or number, but shall be marked in plain letters U.S. Mail. Provided further, that the owners or operators of such cars shall be subject to all the other provisions of this Act.

**Blank Applications, Rules, Etc., Furnished; Act Enforced by Police Officers.**

Sec. 16. It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to provide application blanks for licenses, on the back of which shall be printed this Act, or such extracts therefrom as he may deem necessary, together with such other information, rules and regulations, in regard to the obtaining of license and registration of numbers, as he may see fit. It shall also be the duty of the Secretary of State, to require of sheriffs, constables and other police officers, an enforcement of the provisions of this Act.

**Previous Licenses Extended to December 31, 1913.**

Sec. 17. All licenses issued under the provisions of Chapter 28, Laws of 1912, are extended, without further application or payment of any additional fee on the part of the owners or operators of such motor vehicles, to December 31st, 1913, and persons holding such licenses and numbers are permitted to use the same until such date.

**Repeal Clause.**

Sec. 18. Chapter 28, Laws of 1912, except the records obtained thereunder, and all other acts or parts of acts in conflict herewith, are hereby repealed.

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# 1919 Laws of New Mexico

(Passed March 17, 1919, Effective January 1, 1920)

## CHAPTER 150.

An act to provide for state licensing of motor vehicles, providing for the registration, regulating the operation, use and speed thereof, providing for the temporary licensing of tourist vehicles, limiting the width of tires that may be used on the public highways, making it unlawful To obstruct or impair public highways and bridges, prescribing penalties and liabilities for the violation of this act, and repealing all laws and parts of laws in conflict herewith.

House Bill No. 252 (as amended); Approved March 17, 1919.

*Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of New Mexico:*

**Section 1. Definitions:** Wherever the word "*Secretary*" is used in this act is meant the Secretary of State or his authorized agents.

"*Motor Vehicle*" wherever used in this act shall include all vehicles propelled otherwise than by muscular power.

"*Automobile*" as used in this act shall include all motor vehicles excepting motorcycles using pneumatic tires on all wheels.

"*Motor Trucks*" as used in this act shall include all motor vehicles using solid rubber or metal tires on two or more wheels. Motor trucks equipped with pneumatic tires shall be considered, for licensing purposes, the same as automobiles.

"*Motorcycles*" as used in this act shall include all motor vehicles designed to travel on not more than three wheels in contact with the ground.

"*A Tourist Motor Vehicle*" is defined by this act to be any motor vehicle which may be in or enter into this state after the taking effect of this act licensed for operation during the current year in any state in the United States except New Mexico.

Such motor vehicles as run upon rails shall not be subject to the provisions of this act.

The word "*person*" as used in this act shall be construed to mean and include firms, corporations, associations, etc.

**Sec. 2. Act Effective When.** On and after January 1, 1920, it shall be unlawful for any owner or operator of one or more vehicles to operate same on the highways of New Mexico unless such owner or operator shall have in his possession either a motor vehicle license or a tourist license as defined in this act.

**Sec. 3. Registration Fees.** On and after the first day of January, 1920, and annually thereafter, every owner of one or more motor vehicles in this state shall file in the office of the Secretary of State, on a blank furnished by said office, the name of the manufacturer, the engine number and such further description of such motor vehicle to be registered by him as may be prescribed by the Secretary. Each

application shall be accompanied by the requisite fee for the purpose of said registration and yearly seal, as provided by this act.

**Sec. 4.** All applications shall be attested before a Notary Public or other officer authorized under the law to administer oaths.

The annual license fee for the registration of motor vehicles in this state shall be computed at the rate of forty cents per N.A.C.C. horse-power per year for automobiles and fifty cents per N.A.C.C. horse-power for motor trucks; *Provided*, that the annual license fee for motorcycles shall be three dollars per annum, and that the annual license fee for any automobile or motor truck shall not be less than six dollars.

The N.A.C.C. horse-power of a motor vehicle is defined as the result of multiplying the square of the diameter of the cylinder of the engine used in the motor vehicle by the number of cylinders of said engine and dividing this product by two and one-half.

Display of a receipt from the Secretary showing that application has been made for registration of a motor vehicle and that the license fee has been paid for the current year as provided in this act, shall entitle the holder thereof to operate said motor vehicle upon the highways for a period of sixty days after date of said receipt.

The registration fees determined as above are as follows:

# TABLE OF FEES.

				Auto- mobiles	Motor Trucks
15	N.A.C.C.	H.P.	and under	\$6.00	\$7.50
16	"	"	"	6.40	8.00
17	"	"	"	6.80	8.50
18	"	"	"	7.20	9.00
19	"	"	"	7.60	9.50
20	"	"	"	8.00	10.00
21	"	"	"	8.40	10.50
22	"	"	"	8.80	11.00
23	"	"	"	9.20	11.50
24	"	"	"	9.60	12.00
25	"	"	"	10.00	12.50
26	"	"	"	10.40	13.00
27	"	"	"	10.80	13.50
28	"	"	"	11.20	14.00
29	"	"	"	11.60	14.50
30	"	"	"	12.00	15.00
31	"	"	"	12.40	15.50
32	"	"	"	12.80	16.00
33	"	"	"	13.20	16.50
34	"	"	"	13.60	17.00
35	"	"	"	14.00	17.50
36	"	"	"	14.40	18.00
37	"	"	"	14.80	18.50
38	"	"	"	15.20	19.00
39	"	"	"	15.60	19.50
40	"	"	"	16.00	20.00
41	"	"	"	16.40	20.50
42	"	"	"	16.80	21.00
43	"	"	"	17.20	21.50
44	"	"	"	17.60	22.00
45	"	"	"	18.00	22.50
46	"	"	"	18.40	23.00
47	"	"	"	18.80	23.50
48	"	"	"	19.20	24.00
49	"	"	"	19.60	24.50
50	"	"	and over	20.00	25.00

**Sec. 5. Dealer's License.** Any manufacturer or dealer in motor vehicles in this state may, in lieu of the registering of each machine which he may wish to show or demonstrate on the public highways, apply for registration and secure a general

distinguishing number, which may be attached to any motor vehicle he sends temporarily upon the road for demonstration purposes only, and not for hire, the annual fee for such dealer's registration and distinguishing number, which shall be twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) and any additional numbers desired by any dealer, not exceeding five, will be assigned and registered for a fee of five dollars (\$5.00) each. All other provisions of this act shall apply in each case of dealer's registration.

**Sec. 6. *Engine or Manufacturer's Numbers.*** It shall be unlawful for any person in this state to remove, deface or destroy the engine number or manufacturer's number of any motor vehicle or replace any part bearing such number without re-stamping said number correctly and legibly in approximately the same position the original number occupied. Such re-stamping must be done by or with the consent of the owner of such motor vehicle. Any person found guilty of the violation of this section shall upon conviction be punished by a fine of not exceeding five hundred dollars (\$500.00), or by imprisonment not less than thirty days nor more than five years, or both such fine and imprisonment, in the discretion of the court.

**Sec. 7. *Filing of Applications — Method.*** Upon the receipt of an application for registration of a motor vehicle accompanied by the required fee, the Secretary shall file such application and shall alphabetically and also numerically register and correctly index such motor vehicle with the name, residence and business address of the owner, together with the facts stated in such application, in a book or card index system, to be kept for the purpose, which book or card index shall be kept open to the inspection of the public during reasonable office hours.

**Sec. 8. *Lists of Sheriffs and Chiefs of Police.*** The Secretary of State, shall on or before the first day of July of each year make out and mail to the sheriff of each county in this state, a full and accurate list in alphabetical and numerical order of all motor vehicles so registered, stating the distinctive number so assigned to each, the name of the manufacturer and the engine number, together with the name and residence or business address of the owner or dealer, and at the expiration of every sixty days thereafter a supplemental list of the additional registrations or changes in registration, such lists to be kept on file by said sheriffs or chiefs of police in a conspicuous place in their respective offices, and to be open to the inspection of the public during reasonable office hours.

**Sec. 9. *Registration.*** Upon receipt of an application for registration of a motor vehicle accompanied by the necessary license fee, the Secretary shall cause such motor vehicle to be registered, and without additional charge shall cause to be furnished to the owner of each motor vehicle so registered, a certificate of registration or registration card as evidence that such, owner is licensed to operate such vehicle upon the public highways within this state. Such certificate shall at all times be carried by the owner or operator and subject to the examination on demand of any peace officer; and the Secretary, without additional charge, shall also cause to be issued to the owner of such motor vehicle, with the first registration only, one metal number plate and a distinguishing seal of suitable material of such size and form as the Secretary shall determine, which seal shall be of a distinctly different color for each calendar year, and there shall be at all times a marked contrast between the color of the letters and figures and the background of the seal; *Provided*, however the same Combination of colors may be repeated after five years. Seals to



be furnished each year thereafter upon payment of the annual license fee.

**Sec. 10. *Prorating of Fees.*** On and after January 1, 1920, registrations of motorcycles and motor vehicles under this act shall begin with the first day of January of each year and end with the thirty-first day of December, and all applications for registration or annual licenses of motor vehicles filed after June thirtieth of any year shall be required to pay one-half of the annual fee.

**Sec. 11. *Delinquent Fees.*** The registration fee required to be paid upon a motor vehicle shall become delinquent in case of the operation of the vehicle upon the public highways without the registration required by this act.

**Sec. 12. *Enforced Collection of Fees.*** It is hereby provided, in addition to any and all other penalties, that if at the expiration of thirty (30) days after any registration fee becomes delinquent such fee has not been paid (and registration applied for) a penalty shall be added to the amount of such fee in an amount equal to twenty-five per cent of the fee required, and such fee, together with the amount of said penalty, shall be a lien upon the motor vehicle upon which said registration is delinquent, and the Secretary shall have power, and it is hereby made his duty, to collect the said registration fee, together with the penalty, by sale of such motor vehicle in the manner provided by law for the distraint and sale of personal property for taxes.

**Sec. 13. *Tourist Licenses.*** Upon entering this state a tourist motor vehicle owner or operator shall obtain within thirty days after crossing the state line, from any garage authorized by the Secretary to issue such license, a tourist's license tag, provided said vehicle has been registered and carried such authorized registration license plate or certificate from another state. A tourist license will be made out by any authorized garage on a form to be provided by the Secretary, upon application of the owner or operator thereof, accompanied by a fee of three dollars (\$3.00) for each vehicle so licensed. A tourist license, upon issuance, will entitle the owner or operator so licensed to all the privileges accorded to a resident owner or operator who has obtained a license under this act. Any owner or operator of a tourist motor vehicle entering this state without having such license plate or certificate for the then current period from another state shall be required to pay the same registration fee as a resident of this state.

**Sec. 14. *Penalty.*** The operation of any tourist motor vehicle upon the highways within this state without first having applied for a license as herein provided shall constitute a misdemeanor and render the owner or operator thereof liable to a penalty of not less than twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) nor more than one hundred dollars (\$100.00).

**Sec. 15. *Rules and Regulations.*** The Secretary shall have the power to make such rules and regulations as are necessary for the proper enforcement of this act.

**Sec. 16. *Disposition of Fees.*** The net proceeds of all funds coming into the hands of the Secretary derived from the registration and licenses provided under this act shall be deposited with the State Treasurer, to be by him credited to the "State Road Fund" as defined in Chapter 38, Section 15, Laws of 1917.

**Sec. 17. *Collection of Fees by Counties and Cities Prohibited.*** The certificate of registration and numbering for the purpose of identification, and the fees hereinbefore provided for, shall be in lieu of all other similar registrations and

fees heretofore required by any county, municipality, or other political subdivision of this state; *Provided*, this provision shall not affect the right of incorporated cities, towns and villages to license and regulate the use of motor vehicles for hire in such corporations.

**Sec. 18. *Number Plates and Seals.*** On and after January 1, 1920, every motor vehicle shall at all times, while being used or operated upon the public highways within this state have displayed in a conspicuous place, upon the rear of such motor vehicle, a plate bearing the registration number and the annual license seal assigned such motor vehicle by the Secretary of State for the current year.

**Sec. 19. *Number Plates and Seals — Cost.*** The Secretary shall furnish a number plate and license seal for the current year without extra charge, upon payment of the first registration fee. Plates lost or destroyed that may have to be replaced thereafter shall be furnished upon application to the Secretary for a duplicate plate, accompanied by an affidavit showing loss or destruction, at a cost of \$1.00 for each duplicate plate furnished.

**Sec. 20. *License Plates and Identification Marks.*** All letters, numbers and other identification marks upon a motor vehicle, together with number plates and seals, shall be kept clear and distinct and free from grease or other blurring matter, so that they shall be plainly seen at all times.

**Sec. 21. *Altered Identification Marks.*** No motor vehicle upon which the manufacturer's number or other identification marks have been altered or effaced, shall be licensed under this act, unless satisfactory proof of ownership of said vehicle is presented and filed with the Secretary, or in the case of tourist licenses, with the garage issuing such license.

**Sec. 22. *Transfer of Vehicle.*** When any person, other than a dealer, sells a motor vehicle as defined in this act, he shall endorse upon his certificate of registration a written transfer of the same, and the purchaser of such motor vehicle shall send to the Secretary a notification of such transfer with the name and address in full of such purchaser, together with a transfer fee of one dollar (\$1.00) and the Secretary shall enter upon his books the fact of such transfer and the name and address of the purchaser, who shall be regarded as the owner thereof and amenable to the provisions of this act. Tourists' licenses are not transferable, and upon the sale of a tourist motor vehicle, a new tourist or state license must be procured by the new owner.

**Sec. 23. *Penalties Prescribed for Failure to Register.*** — Any person owning and operating a motor vehicle on the highways within this state, after the taking effect of this act, without registration or without a tourist license, as provided in this act, or without the number plates and seals displayed thereon in accordance with the requirements of this act, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be fined in a sum not less than ten dollars (\$10.00) nor more than twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) for each violation, and each day such motor vehicle or motorcycle is operated upon the highways within the state in violation of the provisions of this act shall constitute a separate offense. Any person obtaining a tourist license or annual seal, as provided herein, from any source other than the Secretary or his authorized agent, or except as hereinbefore provided, or any person not authorized by the Secretary who sells or offers for sale any tourist license, seal or number plate in

imitation of those furnished by the Secretary, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall, upon conviction, be punished by a fine not less than twenty-five dollars nor more than one hundred dollars (\$100.00), or imprisonment for not less than thirty nor more than ninety days, or both such fine and imprisonment.

**Sec. 24. *Prosecutions.*** All prosecutions under this act shall be in the county where such person may live or in which such person may operate such unlicensed, unnumbered, unmarked vehicle, or may use, sell or offer for sale, such number plate or seal.

**Sec. 25. *Rules for Operation of Vehicles on Public Highways.***

(a) The driver or operator of any vehicle in or upon public highways within this state shall drive or operate such vehicle in a careful manner, with due regard for safety and convenience of pedestrians and all other vehicles or traffic upon such highways. Two vehicles which are passing each other in opposite directions shall have the right of way and no other vehicle to the rear of either of such two vehicles shall pass or attempt to pass such two vehicles until after they have cleared each other. On all occasions the driver or operator of any vehicle on or upon any public highway within this state shall travel upon the right-hand side of such highway, unless the road on the left-hand side of such highway is clear and unobstructed for a distance of at least fifty yards ahead.

(b) Vehicles proceeding in opposite directions shall pass each other to the right, each giving the other one-half of the road as nearly as possible.

(c) Vehicles overtaking other vehicles proceeding in the same direction shall pass to the left thereof and shall not again drive to the right until the road is reasonably clear of such overtaken vehicle.

(d) It shall be the duty of the driver, or operator, of a vehicle about to be overtaken and passed, to give way to the right in favor of the overtaking vehicle on suitable and audible signal, given by or on behalf of the operator, driver or other person in charge and control of such overtaking vehicle.

(e) Excepting where controlled by such traffic ordinances or regulations enacted by local authorities, as are permitted under this act, the operator of a vehicle approaching an intersection on the public highways shall yield the right of way to a vehicle approaching such intersection from the right of such first named vehicle.

(f) It shall be the duty of the person operating or in charge of an overtaking vehicle to sound audible and suitable signal before passing a vehicle proceeding in the same direction.

(g) All vehicles approaching an intersection of the public highway with the intention of turning thereat, shall, in turning to the right, keep to the right of the center of such intersection, before turning to the left.

(h) In all passing and overtaking, such assistance shall be given by the occupants of each vehicle respectively to the other as the circumstances shall reasonably demand in order to obtain clearance and avoid accident.

(i) Every person having control or charge of any motor vehicle upon any public highway and approaching any vehicle drawn by an animal or animals or any animal upon which any person is riding, shall operate such motor vehicle or other vehicle in such a manner as to exercise every reasonable precaution to prevent frightening of any such animal and to insure the safety of any person riding or

driving the same; and if any such animal appear frightened, the person in control of such motor vehicle or other vehicle shall reduce its speed, and if requested by signal of the hand, by the driver or rider of any such animal, shall not proceed further toward such animal unless such movement be necessary to avoid injury or accident, until such animal shall be under the control of the rider or driver thereof.

(j) The person in charge of any vehicle in or upon any public highway, before turning, stopping or changing the course of such vehicle, shall see first that there is sufficient space for such movement to be made in safety, and if the movement or operation of other vehicles may reasonably be affected by such turning, stopping or changing of course, shall give plainly visible or audible signal to the person operating, driving or in charge of such vehicle of his intention to turn, stop or change said course.

(k) A motor vehicle shall not pass any railroad, interurban or street car or train not in motion while passengers are alighting from or boarding the same, but such vehicle shall be brought to a full stop, until such car or train shall again be in motion.

(l) Every motor vehicle, when moving along such portion of the road where the curvature of the road or highway prevents a clear view for a distance ahead of one hundred yards shall reduce speed not to exceed ten miles per hour and the operator thereof in approaching curves or sharp turns in the road shall give a warning by his signaling device.

(m) Police patrols, police ambulances, fire patrols, fire engines and fire apparatus, in all cases while being operated as such, shall have the right of way, with due regard to the safety of the public; *Provided*, that this provision shall not protect the driver or operator of any such vehicle or his employer or principal from the consequences of carelessness or negligence.

**Sec. 26. *Operation by Intoxicated Person.*** Any person who shall, while in an intoxicated condition, operate or attempt to operate a motor vehicle upon any public highway or within any incorporated city, town or village within this state, shall, upon conviction, be subject to imprisonment for a period of not less than thirty days or more than one year and a fine of not less than one hundred dollars or more than one thousand dollars.

Any person who knowingly and wilfully accompanies an intoxicated person who is operating a motor vehicle shall, upon conviction, be subject to the same penalties as provided for the punishment of the driver thereof.

**Sec. 27. *Operation by a Minor.*** No owner of a motor vehicle shall permit any person under the age of fourteen years to operate or drive said motor vehicle upon any public highway within this state unless said person under fourteen years of age shall have proven his or her competence to the satisfaction of the Secretary or his authorized agent, as attested by a certificate to be granted in accordance with rules and regulations to be provided by the Secretary, and nothing in this section contained shall be construed to release the owner thereof from the operation of this act or from liability for damage or accident caused by said motor vehicle while being so operated.

**Sec. 28. *Use of Vehicles Without Owner's Consent—Penalty.*** Whoever purposely takes, drives or operates, or purposely causes to be taken, driven or

operated upon any public highway any vehicle without the consent of the owner thereof, shall be punishable by imprisonment in the county jail for not less than six months nor more than one year.

**Sec. 29.** *Tampering With Motor or Devices.* Any person who shall individually or in association with one or more others purposely and without authority from the owner, start, or cause to be started the motor of any motor vehicle, or whoever purposely and maliciously shall shift or change the starting device or gears of a standing motor vehicle to a position other than that in which they were left by the owner or driver of said motor vehicle, or whoever shall, purposely scratch or damage the chasses, running gear, body, sides, top, robe, covering or upholstering of a motor vehicle, the property of another, or shall purposely destroy any part thereof, or shall cut, mash, mark, or in any other way destroy or damage any part, attachment, fastening or appurtenance of a motor vehicle, without the permission of the owner thereof, or whoever purposely shall drain or start the drainage of any radiator or oil tank upon a motor vehicle without permission of the owner thereof, or who purposely shall put any metallic or other substance or liquid in the radiator, carburetor, oil tank, grease cup, oilers, lamps or machinery of a motor vehicle, with the intent to injure or damage the same or impede the working of the machinery thereof, or whoever shall maliciously tighten or loosen any bracket, bolt, wire, nut, screw or other fastening on a motor vehicle, or whoever shall purposely release the brake upon a standing motor vehicle, with the intent to injure said machine, shall, upon conviction thereof, be imprisoned in the county jail for not less than six months or more than one year.

**Sec. 30.** *Unlawful to Carry Over Any Public Bridge or Culvert Any Traction Engine — When.* It shall be unlawful for any person to transport or carry over any public bridge or culvert, upon any public road or highway, or any street or alley in any incorporated city, town or village, any traction engine with lugs on the wheels thereof, or to carry or transport over any such public bridge or culvert any traction engine or separator without having first provided and placed in position planks upon which the wheels of said traction engine or separator shall be run, which planks shall not be less than three inches thick, twelve inches in width. Any person violating the provisions of this article shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof shall be fined in any sum not exceeding five hundred dollars (\$500.00).

**Sec. 31.** *Sale of Heavy Vehicles With Narrow Tires Prohibited.* It shall be unlawful from and after the passage of this act, for any person, firm, association or corporation to import, for sale within the State of New Mexico any wagon or other road vehicle with an intended carrying capacity of more than two thousand pounds which shall have a rim or tire on the wheels of same less than three inches in width, or after the supply purchased within ninety days after the approval of this act shall have been exhausted, to sell or offer for sale any such wagon or road vehicle; *Provided*, this section shall apply to all persons, firms, associations or corporations engaged in the sale of road vehicles, either at wholesale or retail, but shall not apply to individuals selling or offering for sale road vehicles purchased prior to the time when this act shall take effect.

Any person violating the terms of this section shall be subject to a penalty of not less

than one hundred dollars (\$100.00) nor more than one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) and each sale, or offer for sale, in violation hereof shall constitute a separate offense.

**Sec. 32. *Subsequent Convictions.*** Any person who shall be convicted of the violation of any of the provisions of this act may upon any subsequent convictions for a violation of the same provision, within the discretion of the court, be given double the amount of punishment provided for a first violation of such provisions of this act.

**Sec. 33. *Abstracts of Conviction Under Act.*** A full record shall be kept by every justice of the peace, police judge or court in this state of every case in which, a person is convicted of the violation of any of the provisions of this act, and an abstract of such record shall be sent forthwith by the said justice of the peace, police judge or court to the Secretary.

**Sec. 34. *Forms For Abstracts of Convictions.*** Said abstract shall be made upon forms prepared by the Secretary, and shall include all necessary information of parties in the case, the nature of the offense, the judgment of conviction and such other facts as may be called for by the Secretary, and such abstract shall be duly certified. The Secretary shall keep such records in his office, and they shall be open to the inspection of any person during reasonable business hours.

**Sec. 35. *Publication of Laws.*** The Secretary shall, as soon as practicable after the passage of this act, cause to be printed in pamphlet form thirty thousand copies of this act, including therein all other laws of this state regulating the use of public highways or motor vehicles and other vehicles, together with all laws fixing penalties regarding the same, which shall be distributed on demand without charge. When such supply is exhausted the Secretary shall cause such additional copies thereof to be printed from time to time as may be found necessary. The Secretary shall mail a copy of such pamphlet to each motor vehicle owner at the time he mails out to him his first certificate of registration or license provided for in this act.

**Sec. 36. *Penalties.*** The wilful and malicious violation of any of the provisions or requirements contained in this act for which specific penalties are not provided shall constitute a misdemeanor, punishable by fine not to exceed one hundred dollars (\$100.00) ; and for the second or any subsequent offense, by a fine of not to exceed two hundred dollars (\$200.00).

**Sec. 37. *Arrest Without Warrant.*** Any peace officer of this state shall be authorized to arrest without warrant any person found committing a violation of any of the penal provisions of this act within his view or presence.

**Sec. 38. *Repeal of Conflicting Laws.*** All laws and parts of laws in conflict with the provisions of this act are hereby repealed; and if any section, subdivision or clause of this act shall be held as unconstitutional, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of this act.

**Sec. 39.** This act shall take effect and be in full force and effect on and after January 1, 1920.

# 1923 Laws of New Mexico

## CHAPTER 96.

### An Act Relating to Motor Vehicles and Trailers.

H. B. No. 341; Approved March 10, 1923.

*Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of New Mexico:*

**Section 1.** *Definitions.* As used in this Act the following terms shall be construed to mean:

*Highway.* Any public thoroughfare for vehicles.

*Motor Vehicles.* Any vehicle propelled by power other than muscular and not operated exclusively upon rails.

*Motor Truck.* Any motor vehicle designed and used principally for carrying things other than passengers.

*Trailer.* Any vehicle designed for carrying articles or passengers upon its own structure and for being attached to or drawn or propelled by a motor vehicle or tractor, including any vehicle so constructed that a portion of its weight or of its load rests upon the vehicle or tractor by which it is drawn or propelled.

*Commercial Truck or Commercial Car.* Any motor truck or motor vehicle operated for transporting commodities, articles, or passengers for hire not wholly within the limits of the same city, town or village, or operated by jobbers, merchants, peddlers or others for transporting commodities, merchandise or articles for sale or delivery to customers or branch stores not within the limits of the same city, town or village where the same are loaded.

*Tractor.* Any self-propelled vehicle designed principally for drawing or propelling other vehicles and not carrying any considerable load upon its own structure.

*Registrar.* The officer or agency of the State charged with the duty of registering motor vehicles and collecting the fees therefor shall be the State Comptroller.

*Owner.* Any person, firm, corporation or association owning, renting or having the exclusive use of a motor vehicle or trailer.

**Sec. 2.** On and after January 1st, 1924, the annual registration fees for motor vehicles except those for which other rates are provided in this Act shall be:

For each motor bicycle, Three (\$3.00) Dollars,

For each motorcycle with three wheels or side car, Four (\$4.00) Dollars,

For each electric pleasure vehicle for two persons, Twelve (\$12.00) Dollars,

For each electric pleasure vehicle for more than two persons, Twenty-five (\$25.00) Dollars,

For each motor vehicle operated with gasoline, steam or otherwise than by electricity, Forty (40) Cents per horsepower, calculated according to the formula of the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce for internal combustion engines,

which is the square of the diameter of the cylinder multiplied by the number of cylinders divided by two and one-half. The horsepower of steam vehicles shall be calculated according to the formula adopted by the United States Government.

For each trailer drawn or propelled by vehicles included in this section, Five (\$5.00) Dollars, plus fifty (50) Cents for each one hundred pounds rated weight carrying capacity over one thousand pounds, which fee must also be paid for the year 1923.

For vehicles and trailers having any solid tires of rubber or other material, twenty-five per cent will be added to the foregoing fees.

The annual registration fee of each tractor used upon any highway for drawing or propelling trailers or vehicles shall be the same as for motor vehicles of like horsepower, but tractors and road rollers used exclusively for agricultural purposes or road construction shall not be subject to registration.

**Sec. 3.** On and after July 1st, 1923, the annual registration fee for each motor truck exceeding three thousand pounds weight carrying capacity (not a commercial truck) equipped with all pneumatic tires, shall be a minimum fee of Fifteen (\$15.00) Dollars plus Fifty Cents for each one hundred pounds weight carrying capacity over three thousand pounds; and for each trailer so equipped drawn or propelled thereby the annual registration fee shall be Ten Dollars (\$10.00) plus Fifty (50) Cents for each one hundred pounds weight carrying capacity over two thousand pounds.

For such motor trucks or trailers having any solid tires of rubber or other material twenty-five per cent will be added to the foregoing fees.

On and after July 1st, 1923, the annual registration fee for each commercial truck and for each commercial car equipped with all pneumatic tires shall be twenty-five (\$25.00) Dollars plus seventy five (75¢) Cents for each one hundred pounds weight carrying capacity for vehicles carrying passengers.

For each trailer so equipped, drawn or propelled by such truck or car the annual registration fee shall be Fifteen (\$15.00) Dollars plus seventy-five cents for each one hundred pounds weight carrying capacity and plus Three (\$3.00) Dollars for each passenger carrying capacity for a trailer carrying passengers.

For such vehicles having any solid tires or rubber or other material twenty-five per cent will be added to the foregoing fees.

Owners of motor trucks, commercial trucks or cars, included in this section, or of trailers, shall on or before July 1st and thereafter before commencing to operate such vehicles file with the registrar applications in form provided by Section 4 hereof, and shall pay the fees at the rates specified in this Act. Owners who have paid the registration fees heretofore required for 1923 shall remit amounts sufficient to pay the additional fees required by this Act for the half year beginning July 1st, 1923.

**Sec. 4.** On or before January 1st, 1924, and before commencing to operate such vehicle on any highway thereafter every owner of a motor vehicle shall file with the registrar an application for registration setting forth the name and address of such owner, the name of the manufacturer, the year model, the engine number, the number and diameter of cylinders, the weight, the rated carrying capacity and such other information about such vehicle as the registrar may require, which application shall



be accompanied by the registration fees specified in this Act.

Owners applying for registration of vehicles not operated before July 1st in any year shall be required to pay one-half the annual registration fee.

**Sec. 5.** Upon receipt of such application and fee the registrar shall issue and deliver to such owner a registration certificate for such vehicle and without extra charge except for furnishing duplicate plates to replace those lost or mutilated shall issue and deliver to such owner plates bearing the name of the State of New Mexico or abbreviation thereof, the number assigned to such vehicle and in case of a motor truck, commercial truck, commercial car mentioned in Section 3 hereof and in case of a trailer a plate showing the weight and carrying capacity thereof. Such plates shall be attached to and constantly displayed upon said vehicle.

Said plates may be of the material and design prescribed by the registrar and the registration plates shall be of a different color or shade each year.

It shall be unlawful to make, sell, use or display for said purpose any counterfeit plate or plate not issued by the registrar upon payment of the fee required by law.

**Sec. 6.** No registration or license fee shall be required of a tourist resident of another State or country operating a passenger automobile in this State, not carrying passengers or articles for hire or peddling or delivering goods to customers, for the first three months, provided the owner of such vehicle shall have paid the registration or license fees and shall constantly display the registration and number plates required by the laws of such another State or country for the then current year.

In case such vehicle be operated in this State for more than three months, the owner thereof shall be required to apply for registration and to pay the fees and display the plates required by this Act for resident owners; *provided*, that the non-resident or resident owner of every passenger automobile, motor truck, or trailer carrying passengers, freight, express or articles for hire, or operated as a commercial truck or commercial car within this State or between points without and points within this State, shall be required to apply for registration and pay the registration fees, and to secure and constantly display the plates specified in this Act for vehicles and trailers of like class and capacity.

**Sec. 7.** A dealer in motor vehicles may in lieu of registering each vehicle he may wish to demonstrate on any highway, apply for and secure a dealer's demonstration number, which he may use by attaching registration and number plates issued by the registrar to each vehicle so used for demonstration only and not for hire or private use.

The annual registration fee to be paid by such dealer shall be Fifty (\$50.00) Dollars, which shall entitle him to one pair of plates and he shall be required to pay Ten (\$10.00) Dollars for each pair of extra plates he may use.

**Sec. 8.** The registration of motor vehicles and payment of fees therefor required by this Act shall be in lieu of all similar registration required by any county or municipality in this State and no fees or like burden shall be imposed for motor vehicles by any county or municipality, but cities, towns and villages may license operators of, and regulate the use of such vehicles operated for hire within their corporate limits.

**Sec. 9.** It shall be unlawful to operate or transport or cause to be operated or transported upon any highway in this State any motor vehicle or trailer drawn or propelled thereby without having paid the registration fees, or without having secured and constantly displayed the plates required by this Act, or to operate or transport upon the highway any vehicle with a load over ten per cent in excess of the carrying capacity shown by the certificate of registration and carrying capacity plate.

In every case of violation of this section, there shall be added to the registration fee twenty-five per cent thereof and also Five (\$5.00) Dollars for each day or part of day such vehicle is so unlawfully operated or transported. Any duly appointed deputy or agent of the State Comptroller shall have authority to seize such vehicle or trailer and hold the same until said fees and any fine that may be imposed for violation of law shall be paid.

**Sec. 10.** Motor vehicles or trailers owned by and used in the service of the State of New Mexico or any county or municipality thereof, or the United States, or any other State or country need not be registered but must constantly display plates or signs plainly setting forth the name of the State, county, municipality or government in whose service they are operated. It shall be unlawful for any person to operate or transport any such vehicle upon any highway in this State without authority from such owner to use or display such plates or signs by such State, county, municipality or government.

**Sec. 11.** It shall be unlawful to operate any motor truck or commercial truck upon any highway at a speed exceeding the following:

Trucks, with carrying capacity under five thousand pounds, twenty-five miles per hour; with carrying capacity over five thousand pounds and under eight thousand pounds, twenty miles per hour; with carrying capacity over eight thousand pounds and under ten thousand pounds, eighteen miles per hour; with carrying capacity of ten thousand pounds or over, fifteen miles per hour.

In passing schools or operating within, the corporate limits of a city, town or village where houses are not less than five hundred feet apart, no truck shall exceed a speed of ten miles per hour.

Every commercial truck and every motor truck exceeding three thousand pounds carrying capacity shall be equipped with and shall constantly maintain a mirror so placed that the driver or operator can clearly see a vehicle approaching from the rear.

No motor vehicle shall be operated upon any highway with a load upon any wheel exceeding seven hundred pounds for each inch width of tire, or with a structure or load exceeding eight feet in width, or exceeding twelve thousand pounds in weight, except under special permit in writing issued by the authorities having control of such highway.

**Sec. 12.** The State, county or municipal authorities having control of any highway shall have authority to prohibit the use thereof for or restrict the weight or character of motor vehicles traffic thereon when in their judgment, on account of wet weather, recent construction, necessity for repairs, or other condition, such traffic would cause serious damage to such highway or to any bridge or structure thereon or to persons or property.

In such cases plainly printed notices shall be posted at both ends of the section upon which traffic is prohibited or restricted and at points where such roads leave the nearest city or town in both directions. Such notices shall state the loads and kinds of vehicles prohibited, and the time during which traffic is restricted or suspended.

It shall be unlawful to use such highway in any manner contrary to such notices.

**Sec. 13.** The operator or driver of any motor vehicle, upon meeting a vehicle going in the opposite direction, or upon signal from the driver or operator of a vehicle approaching from the rear that he desires to pass, must without unnecessary delay make every reasonable effort to permit the other vehicle to pass and where possible must give the passing vehicle at least one-half the road.

At intersecting highways the vehicle approaching on the driver's right shall have the right of way and a driver desiring to turn to the right or left must give the proper signal and drive to the center of such intersecting highway before turning.

**Sec. 14.** The violation of any provision of this Act shall be deemed a misdemeanor and punishable by fine of not less than Ten (\$10.00) Dollars nor more than One Hundred (\$100.00) Dollars, or by imprisonment in the county jail not exceeding thirty days, or both such fine and imprisonment in the discretion of the Justice of the Peace or Court, but such fine or imprisonment shall not release the owner or operator of a motor vehicle from liability for damages to any highway or structure, or to persons or property caused by or resulting from such violation.

**Sec. 15.** The fees collected under this Act less the cost of collection not exceeding five per cent of the amount collected, shall be paid over by the State Comptroller to the State Treasurer who shall credit two-thirds (2-3) of such monies to the State Road Fund, the same to be budgeted and used by the State Highway Commission for maintenance of State Highways in the several counties as nearly as practicable in proportion to the fees paid by owners residing in each county. The remaining one-third (1-3) of said monies shall be paid over by the State Treasurer to the County Treasurers of the several counties in proportion to the fees paid by the owners residing in each county to be credited to the County Road Fund of each county to be used for maintenance of county roads.

**Sec. 16.** This Act shall be construed to repeal only such provisions of existing law relating to motor vehicles as are in conflict herewith.

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# Issuing Authorities

## Albuquerque Municipal Plates

Albuquerque's 1910 Municipal Ordinance 432 required licensing of motor vehicles operated within the City of Albuquerque. A license fee in the amount of \$2.00 was paid to the City Clerk for registration of automobiles and motorcycles, who in turn issued a permanent license number. The number was required to be displayed upon, or attached to, the rear of cars or the rear of the seat of motorcycles. Since the ordinance said nothing about the issuance of actual license plates, it can be inferred that the owner was required to make, or arrange for someone to make his license plate for him.

## Las Vegas Municipal Plates

Automobile licensing ordinance No. 349 became effective in Las Vegas upon its publication in the newspaper August 13, 1910 [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, August 13, 1910]. The ordinance was similar to those passed in other New Mexico cities the same year, and its principal requirement was for the display of a single license plate, to be supplied by City Clerk Charles Tamme, after payment of an annual five-dollar licensing fee. Motorcycles were required to be licensed as well as automobiles, and the fee was the same \$5 as required for automobiles.

## Raton Municipal Plates

As reported in the *Raton Daily Range* for February 1, 1911, Ordinance No. 169 was passed at the Raton City Council meeting which took place on the evening January 31, 1911, and publication of the ordinance took place in the February 1 and February 2 editions of the *Daily Range*. The ordinance states that it was to become effective "five days after its passage and publication," which would have made it effective on February 7, 1911. All drivers of motor vehicles were required to obtain a license for that purpose, at a fee of \$1.00 per year, payable to the City Clerk.

The owners of all automobiles, motorcycles and other motor vehicles were additionally required to obtain a permanent license for the machine itself at a total cost of \$5.00, also payable to the City Clerk. The clerk issued the license "numbers" upon payment of the aforementioned fee, but it is unclear whether this simply referred to the number printed on the license, or an actual physical license

plate. Eric Tanner, ALPCA Archivist, believes that the \$5.00 fee, being relatively high for the time, included an actual license plate to be given to the owner, as was the case in Las Vegas, which charged an identical fee and did supply the plate.

## **Santa Fe Municipal Plates**

Within the Santa Fe Municipal Ordinances, Section 279, an ordinance passed by the City Council on November 1, 1910, set forth the requirement that motor vehicles operated within the corporate limits of the City of Santa Fe be licensed not later than November 10, 1910. A fee of \$8.00 (\$4.00 for motorcycles) was paid to the City Clerk, whereupon the Clerk issued a license bearing a number. It was then the duty of the vehicle's owner "to cause to be placed, at his own expense, upon his car ... the corresponding number of such license with "S.F."

## **State License Plates**

The Automobile License Law of 1912 vested the responsibility for automobile registration with the office of the Secretary of State. This office accepted applications and fees, and issued registration certificates and license plates. The fees collected were turned over to the State Treasurer at the end of the fiscal year, where they were credited to the state Road Fund (less the Secretary of State's expenses of administering the law). Antonio Lucero was the Secretary of State 1912-1918, succeeded by Manuel Martinez 1919-1922 and Soledad C. Chacón 1923-1926. [*Official New Mexico Blue Book 1989-1990*]

While the Automobile License Law of 1912, Sec. 1, paragraph 2, expressly allowed municipalities to continue licensing motor vehicles owned by residents of their own cities, the subsequent 1913 Motor Vehicle Law, Sec. 8, reversed that stance and explicitly prohibited municipalities from requiring any license in addition to the state license.

As provided for by a later act of the New Mexico state legislature [*Laws of 1923*, Chapter 96, Section 1], the responsibility for motor vehicle licensing was transferred from the Secretary of State's office to the State Comptroller's office effective April 16, 1923. R.H. Carter was the Comptroller at the time of this transition. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, April 27, 1923, p.5 c.2] Concurrent with the transfer, the Motor Vehicle Department was established as an office under the State Comptroller. [*Motor Vehicle Register 1923*, July 1, 1923, title page.]

At the time of the transfer many, if not most other states still placed this responsibility with their own Secretaries of State. New Mexico Secretary of State Soledad C. Chacón would recommend in 1926 that the function be returned to her office, but the recommendation was never acted on. [Report of the Secretary of State [Soledad C. Chacón], Thirteenth and Fourteenth Fiscal Years, (Fifteenth Fiscal Year from July 1, 1926 to December 1, 1926) 1925-26, last page. (FY 1925, FY 1926, FY 1927. The rather convoluted title of this report was a result of the 1926 change of the Fiscal Year from December 1 – November 30, to July 1 – June 30.)]

The licensing authority stayed with the State Comptroller for a number of years, and during that time the Motor Vehicle Register books and the envelopes in which license plates were mailed to automobile owners showed the return address as being that of the State Comptroller. [e.g.: *Motor Vehicle Register 1923*, title page, R.H. Carter; 1928 Motor Vehicle Register, title page, Gilberto Mirabal; *Motor Vehicle Register 1931*, title page, J.M. Lujan, State Comptroller and Manuel Gallegos, Motor Vehicle Commissioner; 1932 license plate mailing envelopes, J.M. Lujan, State Comptroller; *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1933*, front cover, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, and Diego Salazar, Motor Vehicle Commissioner; *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1934*, front cover, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, and Diego Salazar, Motor Vehicle Commissioner.]

The *Laws of 1935*, Chapter 9, created the New Mexico Bureau of Revenue, headed up by a Commissioner of Revenue appointed by the Governor. The first Commissioner was James J. Connelly, who had been the State Treasurer prior to this appointment. (Connelly was succeeded a short time later by John D. Bingaman.) Along with several other state agencies, Section 1 of this law placed the Comptroller's office and all of its functions under the oversight of the new Bureau of Revenue. The new organizational structure was reflected on the covers of the *Automobile License Directories*, beginning in 1935. [New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1935, front cover, John D. Bingaman, Commissioner of Revenue, and Diego Salazar, Motor Vehicle Commissioner; *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1936*, front cover, John D. Bingaman, Commissioner of Revenue, and Diego Salazar, Motor Vehicle Commissioner; *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1937*, front cover, John D. Bingaman, Commissioner of Revenue, and Diego Salazar, Motor Vehicle Commissioner; *New Mexico Automobile License Directory 1938*, front cover, John D. Bingaman, Commissioner of Revenue, and Diego Salazar, Motor Vehicle Commissioner.]

The *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. XXIV, 1949, gives this concise synopsis of the evolution of the motor vehicle department: "Bureau of Revenue, Motor Vehicle Division: Created in 1913 as a branch of the office of the Secretary of state, transferred in 1923 to Office of State Comptroller and in 1933 [sic] to the Bureau of Revenue. The department now [1949] consists of four divisions: Registration, Title, Inspection and Liens." [The 1933 date is clearly in error, and should have been stated as "1935."]

Since the 1940s there have been several changes in organizational structure and lines of authority. The department's publications show that as late as 1975 the organization was using the name Department of Motor Vehicles, but by 1978 it had changed to Motor Vehicle Division. [Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 *License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975; and 1978 *New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director] As of 2020 the Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) is one of seven divisions within the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department (TRD). The Director of the MVD reports to the head of the TRD, who in turn is a Secretary in the Governor's cabinet.

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# Manufacturers

If New Mexico motor vehicle registration records are scarce, records of who manufactured the state's license plates in the early years seem to be entirely absent. Nonetheless, all available evidence strongly supports the belief that all New Mexico plates prior to 1934 (excepting 1926) were manufactured by commercial companies, and as far as is known, all of these were out-of-state suppliers. The majority of this information comes from contemporary news reports.

## 1912-1913

To date, little concrete documentation has surfaced concerning the first eight years of manufacture of New Mexico's license plates. We do know for sure that they were *not* manufactured at the State Prison during this time (and would not be until 1934). Eric Tanner, ALPCA's archivist, however, points out striking similarities between New Mexico's 1912-1913 plates and New Hampshire's 1912 plates, the latter known with certainty to have been made by the S.G. Adams Co. of St. Louis. Both used identical dies and identical folded and crimped edges. Additionally, the backs of both were clearly painted by hand, as evidenced by prominent brush marks. Even more similarities are seen in size, bolt hole and slot placement, and paint color. The foregoing is further corroborated by news reports of the time stating that 1,500 plates had been received in Santa Fe from St. Louis and were being distributed by the Secretary of State to motor vehicle owners.

[*Santa Fe New Mexican*, October 11, 1912, p.2, c.4-5]

## 1914-1919

Though not conclusive, similarities in the dies and other design features hint strongly at the possibility of the 1914-1919 plates (excepting only the "thin" variety 1918 plates) having been made by the Grimm Stamp & Badge Co. of St. Louis, Missouri, which is known to have made the 1924 New Mexico tags.

## 1920-1923

The Secretary of State, late in 1919, announced that the first 17,520-pound shipment of the state's new porcelain plates was in transit to New Mexico from the manufacturer in Los Angeles. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 26, 1919, p.6, c.1] The name of the specific Los Angeles maker was not given in news reports of the day, but its identity can be inferred with reasonable certainty as being the California Metal Enameling Company. See the chapter on "Porcelains" for more details.

The porcelain plates were used for the four years 1920-1923, and every indication is that they were all made by the same company.

## 1924

When the decision was made to abandon porcelain plates and return to embossed steel plates for 1924, the state selected the Grimm Stamp & Badge Co. of St. Louis, Missouri, to make them. The plates would be black on orange for cars and trucks, while commercial cars would be red on grey. [*Santa Fe New Mexican* October 26, 1923, p.2, c.4]

## 1925

Although written documentation has not been located, it is presumed that the 1925 plates were also made by Grimm Stamp & Badge. The inference comes from the fact that the size, shape, layout, and dies are identical between the two years, despite the added “FRONT” and “REAR” designations for '25.

## 1926

New Mexico arranged to have its plates made at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in 1926 rather than having them made by a commercial company. Some of Oklahoma's own plates during the 1920s were long and narrow, and New Mexico's plates were made in this shape for this year as well. Probably money was saved by using the blanks and stamping dies that were already on hand.

In late summer or early fall of 1925, the state entered into a contract with the Oklahoma prison to have 45,000 pairs of tags made, then apparently expanded the order by an additional 10,000 plates at a later date, as ultimately some 55,344 vehicles were registered by the end of the year. [*Indian Journal* (Eufaula, Oklahoma), September 3, 1925, p.14, c.2] As far as is known, this was the only time New Mexico's license plates were made at a prison before the New Mexico's own state prison permanently took over the job in late 1933, beginning its work with the manufacture of 1934 plates.

## 1927

Early in 1926 it was announced that negotiations were in progress to have New Mexico's 1927 plates made at the Colorado State Penitentiary, and, in fact, that a contract had already been let. Under that contract the Colorado prison would supply the 1927 plates at a price of 13 cents a pair. [*Roswell Daily Record*, March 29, 1926, p.4, c.6] If this was really the case, the contract must have been later canceled, as the state ended up getting the plates cheaper elsewhere.

State Comptroller R.H. Carter reported on July 28, 1926, that the contract for 1927 plates had been awarded to the Gopher Stamp and Manufacturing Company of St. Paul, Minnesota. The cost was 11.91 cents per pair, colors would

be black on yellow, with the colors reversed for commercial cars. [*Gallup Independent*, July 30, 1926, p.7, c.4] As commercial truck plates used the same base plate as those for commercial cars, it is presumed that they were also the reverse of passenger car colors.

## **1928**

Assistant State Comptroller H. Charles Roehl announced that the contract for the 1928 plates had been awarded to the Gopher Stamp & Die Company of St. Paul, Minnesota. The order was for “58,000 [pairs of] plates for pleasure cars and 3,700 [pairs] for commercial cars and trucks.” The colors were given as “dark blue with gold letters for ... cars and the reverse for commercial cars.” [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, November 1927, p.14] As commercial truck plates used the same base plate as those for commercial cars, they were also the reverse of passenger car colors, as confirmed by known surviving examples.

## **1929**

Toward the end of 1928 Roehl released a statement to the effect that the 1929 plates were on sale, with 70,000 pairs having been ordered, but with no mention of the supplier. It is virtually certain, however, that these were made by Gopher Stamp & Die (see the statement below made by Comptroller Juan Vigil in August 1932). Colors for passenger plates were given as “tulodian red numerals on a cream yellow background.” [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, December 1928, p.20]

## **1930**

In mid-1929 Mr. Roehl announced the colors for 1930 as being gold numerals on a black background for all automobiles and trucks, whether they were in private or commercial use. The same was true for Bus plates. (“Butterscotch” would be a more accurate name for the color of the numerals, and they differ from those on the 1930 Governor plate, which in fact did use a true gold paint for the numerals.) Once more, though, there was no mention of the manufacturer, but it is again virtually certain that these were made by Gopher Stamp & Die (see the statement below made by Comptroller Juan Vigil in August 1932). [*New Mexico Highway Journal*, August 1929, p. 26]

## **1931**

An August 4, 1930, press release from Sam Stevens, head of the motor vehicle bureau, announcing details of the 1931 plates was much more informative. A contract for these plates was awarded to the Gopher Stamp & Die Company of St. Paul. The contract called for the delivery of 50,000 pairs of plates for pleasure cars; 15,000 pairs for trucks; 1,000 pairs for buses, taxis and driverless cars; 500

pairs for the Highway Department, 500 pairs for other Official cars and trucks (state, city and county); 250 pairs for United States Official cars; 300 for dealers (unknown whether these were pairs or singles); 850 for trailers (singles); 250 for motorcycles (singles); and 200 samples (singles). The plates would be black on yellow. [*Clovis Evening News-Journal*, August 4, 1930, p.5, c.4]

The price paid, which averaged about one cent less per plate than the previous year, came out to 8.35 cents per pair for all plates except for 6 cents each for the single trailer and motorcycle plates, and 5 cents for each sample. [All details from *Clovis Evening News-Journal*, August 4, 1930, p.5, c.4]

## 1932

Gopher Stamp was out of the picture for 1932, replaced by Shwayder Trunk Company of Denver, Colorado as the supplier of New Mexico's license plates for this year. The initial shipment was 12,000 pairs of plates, just a small fraction of what would be needed to handle the 77,000 registrations that would be accomplished by year's end. As events were to unfold, state officials would later regret the deal having gone in this direction. [*Albuquerque Journal*, October 14, 1931, p.1, c.7. (The name Shwayder is misspelled in this and several other news reports of the time, and an incorrect spelling of "Schwayder" is commonly seen. Shwayder, which made a line of suitcases called "Samson," later changed its name to Samsonite, arguably the most widely known luggage brand today.)]

The contract for the plates was arranged between Shwayder and the New Mexico State Comptroller's office by a salesman whose name was King Trione, acting as agent for Shwayder. At the same time, Trione also handled the sale of the 1932 registration certificate holders to the state. (See the chapter on "Registration Certificate Holders" for more details on these interesting little devices, which the news media consistently referred to as "gadgets.") Mr. Trione received a commission on both of these sales. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 2, 1932, p.1, c.7, continued on p.6, c.7]

Things began to fall apart after Trione was divorced, and his aggrieved ex-wife, Edna Trione, alleged during an alimony hearing before District Judge H.A. Kiker in Raton that Mr. Trione had shared his commissions with the State Comptroller, J.M. "Jake" Lujan. The named parties denied the kickback allegations, but a month-long investigation by Attorney General E.K. Neumann ensued. [*Roswell Daily Record*, June 2, 1932, p.1, c.1, continued on p.3, c.4]

The investigation uncovered no evidence to support criminal charges, but Governor Arthur Seligman opined that "bad judgement" was involved. That was enough to bring about the resignations of both Comptroller Lujan and Manuel Gallegos, chief of the motor vehicle department. Juan N. Vigil, then a member of the State Tax Commission, resigned that position and was appointed in turn by Governor Seligman to replace Lujan as Comptroller. [*Roswell Daily Record*, June 2, 1932, p.1, c.1, continued on p.3, c.4] With the state badly burned by that scandal, the Gopher Co. was destined to return to manufacturing plates for New Mexico, albeit for only one more year.

There was some unfinished business to attend to first, however. Vigil, the new comptroller, concluded that the certificate holders didn't comply with the provision of the state law which required that the holders make it impossible to remove the certificates without serious damage or destruction. "Any ten year old child could remove the certificate from the present container with ease," said Vigil. [*Roswell Daily Record*, July 9, 1932, p.8, c.5]

Former Comptroller Lujan had committed the state to a contract for 80,000 of the "gadgets" back on October 3, 1931, at a cost of 28½ cents each, for a total of \$22,800. [*Clovis Evening News-Journal*, September 10, 1932, p.1, c.3] Attorney General Neumann, whose investigation included a trip to Denver to interview officials of the Shwayder company [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 18, 1932, p.5, c.7], came to the opinion that Lujan had no authority to enter into the contract in the first place. On July 13, 1932, the AG dispatched a letter to both Shwayder and Straud K. Wood, demanding refund of the entire amount. [*Roswell Daily Record*, July 14, 1932, p.3, c.4] (Mr. Wood was the inventor and holder of the patent on the devices and had contracted with Shwayder to make the containers. He in fact had received the lion's share of the \$22,800.) [*Clovis Evening News-Journal*, September 10, 1932, p.1, c.3] Two months later there had been no response and on September 10, 1932, Neumann filed suit in District Court in Denver against both Shwayder and Wood.

Just what transpired next is unclear, but the Attorney General's 1933-1934 biennial report shows the disposition of the case as "dismissed." [*Report of the Attorney General of New Mexico, January 1, 1933 to December 31, 1934*, p.20] The plaintiff and respondents may have reached an out-of-court settlement, or perhaps the judge found New Mexico's case too weak to proceed. The reason will remain a mystery until further documentation is located. On the other hand, Judge Kiker ruled in favor of Edna Trione, ordering Mr. Trione to pay up delinquent alimony in the amount of \$68.20. [*Clovis Evening News-Journal*, May 2, 1932, p.1, c.3]

A much more detailed account of the scandal will be found at the end of this chapter.

## 1933

During August of 1932 Juan N. Vigil, the State Comptroller at that time, said that five bids had been received by his office for the 1933 plates, which had been narrowed down to two bids which were being considered for the final selection. The competing companies were S. G. Adams Company of St. Louis with a bid of \$7,417.19, and the Gopher Stamp & Die Company of St. Paul at \$7,892.80. These bids were for an initial delivery of 65,000 pairs of plates, with an option for 10,000 additional pairs (75,000 pairs total) if the demand so warranted. If the options were to be exercised, the cost totals would be \$9,111.94, and \$9,350.55, respectively.

Although the Gopher Company's bid was slightly higher, Vigil said that he was "inclined to favor the Gopher bid," because in his opinion the samples submitted by the Gopher company showed better workmanship. Moreover, he said, "The state has been dealing with this company for four or five years prior to last year and ... they have always given satisfaction. That, I believe, is something to be taken into consideration."

All plates, except the truck plates, were to be yellow with red letters and numerals. The truck plates would be red with yellow numbers and letters. [All details above from *Albuquerque Journal*, August 21, 1932, p.10, c.3]

In fact, Mr. Vigil did approve the Gopher bid, with the announcement being made to that effect about a week later. [*Gallup Independent*, August 30, 1932, p.1, c.2]

Mr. Vigil's remark that the state had been dealing with the Gopher Stamp & Die Company for the past four or five years prior to the previous year takes us back to 1927. As we saw earlier, R.H. Carter announced in mid-1926 that the Gopher Company had been selected to make the 1927 plates. This information confirms with certainty that Gopher Stamp & Die made all of New Mexico's plates from 1927 through 1931. The 1932 plates, as seen above, were made by a different company.

### **1934–1998**

As it turned out, 1933 was to be the last year for a long time that New Mexico's plates would be ordered from a commercial company. In January of that year a statement was released from Warden Ed B. Swope of the State Penitentiary, recommending that machinery be installed at the State Pen in Santa Fe for manufacture of all of New Mexico's license plates and road signs.

Swope needed \$15,000 for the purchase and installation. The legislature had already set up a revolving fund of \$10,000 for the purpose of establishing new industries at the prison. If the State Comptroller would supply another \$5,000 as an advance on the manufacture of the 1934 plates, the manufacturing facility could be purchased and installed, thereby saving the state \$2,500 per year initially, and even more as the cost of the equipment was amortized. [*New Mexico Magazine*, January 1933, p.39]

The warden's recommendation was accepted, and the state legislature passed the necessary legislation. [*Laws of 1933*, Chapter 5; approved February 1, 1933] The law authorized the needed \$15,000, authorized the State Penitentiary to manufacture the plates, and required the State Comptroller and State Highway Department to buy all their license plates and road signs from the prison. The law did also require that the prison sell the plates and signs "at a cost not to exceed the average market price for such supplies."

A contract was awarded to the John Wald Company of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania in the amount of \$14,400 for the machinery and installation [*Correspondence, John R. Wald Co. to the author, September 5 & 6, 2013*], and by August the equipment had arrived and was being set up at the prison. [*New Mexico Magazine*, August 1933, p.38]

For the next 65 years, with only one major interruption, the cons faithfully stamped out all of New Mexico's license plates, and did a good job of it. The quality and appearance of plates produced during this period are considered to

have been very good, and included some of New Mexico's most attractive plates, especially during the 1930s and 1940s.

Interestingly, though New Mexico's own tags were bought from the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in 1926, the New Mexico State Penitentiary was not permitted to make plates for anyone outside of the state. [*New Mexico Blue Book 1935-1936*, p. 60]

### **1953 Legislative Plates**

Well, actually, the prisoners didn't make *all* the plates. In 1953 the practice of providing special legislative license plates to State Representatives and Senators was initiated. These plates were made on flat, heavy-gauge metal, not embossed. With a reflectorized background, all lettering, numerals, and design elements were silk-screened onto the plate. These plates, at least for this one year, were made by the Hal Wolfe Screw Machine Products Co. of Portland, Oregon. And they didn't cost New Mexico a cent. They were a gift to the state from the manufacturer, which itself precipitated a brouhaha.

One of the firm's principal activities was the manufacture of license plates, and some persons felt that the company was passing out favors to the legislators as a means to get its foot in the door for future plate manufacturing contracts. But politicians will be politicians, and they not only got to keep these plates, but special tags have continued to be available to them ever since (excepting 1954). It is not clear whether Wolfe Screw Machine continued to make them, but the same style of flat, non-embossed, silk-screened plate was used for a number of years to follow, so it's entirely possible that the company's foot was indeed in the door for at least some period of time. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, February 8, 1953, p.16, c1.]

### **The Fire**

A production hiccup occurred on the morning of December 9, 1951, when the entire plate plant at the prison burned to the ground while the new 1952 plates were being stamped out. The fire was believed to have been started when a prisoner carrying a mop soaked with paint and thinner got too close to the bake oven used to dry paint on the license plates.

Destroyed were the license plate manufacturing facility, the paint shop, the prison warehouse, the leather shop, and a brand new training classroom, not to mention 8,000 just-finished 1952 license plates. Warden Joe Tondre estimated the damage at a quarter of a million dollars. Unharmed were about 50,000 completed license plates that were stored in another building, but another 250,000 were yet to be manufactured.

On the morning after the blaze, the initial assessment was that all of the manufacturing equipment had been ruined beyond repair, and officials began

negotiating with neighboring states to have the remainder of the 1952 license plates made at one of their facilities. [All details from *Albuquerque Tribune*, December 10, 1951, p.9, c.1]

The John Wald Co. of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, manufacturer of the stamping press and other machinery, sent a representative to Santa Fe to inspect the damage. Given a few days to examine the equipment more closely, it began to look as if the loss wasn't as complete as first thought. Meanwhile, it was decided that the repair process would include an upgrade that eliminated the bake oven and replaced it with a system of infra-red light bulbs to dry the paint. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, December 16, 1951, p.5, c.6]

Within a month the plant was back in operation, and by January 9, 1952, manufacture and delivery of license plates had resumed. The first ones off the press were a batch of 1952 trailer plates, said to have been rushed through so quickly that the paint was still sticky when distributed. Officials hoped to have truck plates available within another week, while they continued to get by with the 50,000 passenger plates which had escaped the fire. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 9, 1952, p.12, c.4]

Early estimates had been that the damage amounted to as much as \$250,000, but it had turned out that the stamping machine suffered only minimal damage. The final tally of the damage to the building and its contents was \$37,000, of which \$18,401 was covered by insurance. [*Albuquerque Tribune*, July 15, 1952, p.22, c.3]

## 1999–2020

The prison kept the job for another forty-seven years, until a bean counter in Santa Fe concluded in 1998 that a commercial company in Canada could make the plates cheaper than the convicts. The savings would be 14 cents per plate, even including shipping to the U.S. The Motor Vehicle Division agreed, and entered into a contract with Waldale Manufacturing, Ltd., of Amherst, Nova Scotia, effective January 1, 1999. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, December 4, 1998, p.12, c.4]

This did not happen without a lot of griping about leaving the prisoners with nothing to do. The administration countered that the switch would save the state \$300,000 a year, and, besides, they had other things in mind which would occupy the prisoners' time. One idea was to put them to work, along with the nearly half-million dollars worth of idle machinery, making novelty license plates for private industry. If that didn't work, it was planned to set up a telephone call center with prisoners answering calls about vehicle registration. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, December 17, 1998, pB-6, c.1]

Whether any of that came to pass was not revealed, but as of 2020 New Mexico's plates were still being made in Amherst by the Waldale Irwin Hodson Group, as the company is now known.



# Historical Details of the 1932 Kickback Scandal

Earlier in this chapter we gave a brief overview of the 1932 scandal involving monetary kickbacks allegedly given by a license plate salesman to the New Mexico State Comptroller. For those with an interest in the historical details of the story, a more in-depth account is related here.

Except where otherwise cited, all details below are from the *Report of Attorney General's Investigation of J.M. Lujan, State Comptroller, and His Dealings with Others in Connection with the Charges of Graft Made Relating to the 1932 Motor License Plate Contract and the Purchase of the Automobile Certificate Containers*, prepared by New Mexico Attorney General E.K. Neumann, May 24, 1932. The original report, which describes the incident in considerable detail, survives to this day among the papers of Governor Arthur Seligman.

New Mexico's first automobile licensing law vested the authority for registration of motor vehicles with the Secretary of State. [1912 Laws of New Mexico, Chapter 28.] A later act of the state legislature [Laws of 1923, Chapter 96, Section 1] transferred the responsibility to the State Comptroller's office effective April 16, 1923. Concurrent with the transfer, the Motor Vehicle Department was established as an office under the State Comptroller. [Motor Vehicle Register 1923, July 1, 1923, title page.] There would be later changes in the lines of authority, but it was during the period of the Comptroller's oversight that the kickback scandal erupted.

Having won the November 1930 gubernatorial race, Governor Arthur Seligman, a Democrat, took office on January 1, 1931, and immediately began making appointments to fill out his administration. Several of these, including the selection of Ed Swope as Superintendent of the State Penitentiary and J.M. "Jake" Lujan as State Comptroller, were "recess" appointments, meaning that they were made before the state legislature had convened, thereby bypassing the usual confirmation process in the State Senate. Despite howls of protest by State Senator A.M. Edwards and others, the appointments stood. [Roswell Daily Record, February 17, 1931, p.1, c.5, continued on p.6, c.5]

Swope would go on to receive acclaim as the man who established the license plate manufacturing plant at the state pen, but Lujan was destined to fall from grace after little more than a year on the job.

Jake Lujan was a Democrat from the small town of Des Moines, N.M. (pop. 362 at the time), about 40 miles east of Raton. [*New Mexico Blue Book 1931-1932*, p.45, and 1930 U.S. Census] Shortly after taking office himself, Lujan, on January 7, 1931, appointed Fred Gould of Albuquerque as First Assistant State Comptroller. Gould had served as special assistant to Rupert Asplund, the State Comptroller in the previous administration, and was considered a competent force in the Comptroller's office. [*Clovis Evening News-Journal*, January 7, 1931, p.1, c.4]

In his position as Comptroller, Lujan oversaw the motor vehicle department, which in turn was headed up by Manuel A. Gallegos who hailed from the tiny burg of Tusas, N.M (pop. 88), about 45 miles northwest of Taos. [*New Mexico Blue Book 1931-1932*, p.45, and 1930 U.S. Census]

One of Lujan's first tasks on the job was to secure the manufacture and purchase of 1932 license plates for the coming year. Moreover, New Mexico law now required that automobile owners display their registration certificates in a special holder provided by the state. {*Laws of 1929*, Chapter 121, § 5½ [sic].} The law had been on the books for two years, but had not yet been implemented for lack of funds. Jake Lujan would be the one to start that ball rolling. (See the chapter on "Registration Certificate Holders" for more details on these interesting little devices, which the news media consistently referred to as "gadgets.")

The Gopher Stamp & Die Company of St. Paul, Minnesota had made all of New Mexico's plates from 1927 through 1931, and the state had been fully satisfied with the quality and price throughout those years. (See details earlier in this chapter.) Comptroller Lujan, though, selected an altogether different company to supply both the license plates and the certificate holders. The new supplier was the Shwayder Trunk Company of Denver. Had the Gopher Co. been underbid, or was there a more sinister reason for the selection?

Founded in 1910, Shwayder Trunk was a large concern which manufactured a wide assortment of luggage, including a particularly rugged line of suitcases marketed under the name Samson (after the biblical strongman of the same name). Shwayder, which is often seen misspelled in news reports of the time as "Schwayder," changed its name to Shwayder Brothers, Inc. about the time the scandal was unfolding. (The change was unrelated to that trouble, though.) Later still, the name was changed again, this time to "Samsonite." Under the latter name the company became what is today one of the world's largest and best known luggage manufacturers.

By 1931, however, the deepening Depression had so badly impacted discretionary travel by Americans that sales of Shwayder luggage fell precipitously. In order to stay afloat the company found it necessary to branch out into the manufacture of other products, one of which was license plates for motor vehicles.

The contracts for both the plates and certificate holders were arranged between Shwayder and the New Mexico State Comptroller (Lujan) by a salesman whose name was King Trione, acting as agent for Shwayder. Mr. Trione received a commission on both of these sales.

Events took a turn for the worse after Trione was divorced and he fell behind on alimony payments. The split had occurred on October 28, 1931, with the divorce decree requiring King to pay alimony of \$50 per month [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, May 2, 1932] to his ex-wife, Edna Trione. After months of receiving little or no money, Edna finally sued King to recover the delinquent payments.

King F. Trione and Edna L. Trione lived at the time in Raton, and the lawsuit was heard in that city on April 30, 1932, by District Judge H.A. Kiker. While King pleaded poverty, Mrs. Trione intended to demonstrate that her ex-husband was flush with money. He had received, she testified, a total of \$3,000 (equivalent to about \$48,000 today) from the two sales commissions mentioned above.

The real bombshell that she unloaded on the court, though, was that King had shared those commissions with the Comptroller, Jake Lujan. The kickback, she testified, was made by paying off several loans (totaling \$650, plus interest) that Lujan had taken out at a Raton bank in 1930 and 1931, and had subsequently been unable to repay.

The named parties denied the allegations, but within two days the mud was splattered over the front page of every newspaper in the state, compelling Governor Seligman to suspend Lujan and direct Attorney General E.K. Neumann to investigate the accusations. J.A. McNabb, Jr., First Assistant State Comptroller, was appointed to head up the Comptroller's office for the duration of the suspension. [Individual letters from Governor Arthur Seligman to J.M. Lujan, E.K. Neumann and J.A. McNabb, Jr., all dated May 2, 1932.] (As we shall see, Fred Gould was by this time no longer the First Assistant State Comptroller.)

The AG went to work immediately, traveling to, among other places, Raton and Denver to interview all of the involved parties. Within three weeks he and his staff had dug up an astonishing amount of dirt. His findings were delivered to the governor on May 24, 1932, in a report that runs some 68 legal-size typewritten pages. The most relevant parts of the story are related here.

King Frank Trione was born in France (or Italy, depending on which U.S. Census records you believe) in 1897 or 1898, and his first and middle names were likely Americanized after he immigrated to the United States in 1913. [1930 U.S. Census and 1940 U.S. Census] Almost nothing is known of his history before he started making news in 1932.

By 1930 King was married to Edna L. Trione and living in Raton with Edna and her then 16-year-old son, Walter F. Kerr, by a former marriage. [1930 U.S. Census] Edna's previous married name was Edna L. Kerr, and she and Walter were known to have been living with Edna's parents, William and Sarah L. Messer, in Trinidad, Colorado in 1920 so she must have already been divorced or widowed from her first husband at that time. [1920 U.S. Census] That may be where she met King, as the *1922 Trinidad City Directory* showed him there in that year with the occupation of "salesman."

Trione made his living as a salesman representing a number of different companies and products, but he was also a Colfax County Democratic politician. [Las Vegas Daily Optic, May 2, 1932, p.1, c.8] In the latter capacity he had made numerous acquaintances in the state government, one of whom was Jake Lujan. When Lujan began making preparations in early 1931 to solicit bids for the 1932 license plates and registration certificate holders ("gadgets") King Trione showed up in Santa Fe. There is evidence to indicate that Trione either helped write, or strongly influenced the writing of the bid specifications for both the plates and the gadgets.

### **The License Plates**

Among other things, the plate specifications called for three coats of paint on the front and two coats on the back of the license plates. Moreover, the specs required that the paint be the equivalent of Republic Paint Company white No. 6566 and green No. 7603. Obviously, any company bidding would be careful to specify that exact paint on its proposal rather than taking a chance on using some other brand that the state might reject as not being "equivalent."

Why would Comptroller Lujan call out a specific brand of paint in the specifications? Well, because King Trione was the area salesman for that brand, of course. With more than 165,000 individual plates to be made, and all those coats of paint, something on the order of 415,000 square feet of surface would be painted. That's a lot of paint, and a lot of commission in Trione's pocket regardless of who won the contract.

Meanwhile, Trione approached Shwayder Trunk, proposing that he be named as their agent in bidding on the license plate contract, telling Maurice Shwayder that he was the agent for several other companies which also would be bidding on the contract. Mr. Shwayder said that he would agree to Trione being their agent only if Trione disassociated himself from the other companies. Trione agreed to this, but in fact he secretly retained his position as agent for the S.G. Adams Company of Saint Louis. In other words, during the bidding, Trione was working two of the companies against each other.

The license plate bids were solicited in early July 1931, with the deadline for receipt of bids set at noon on July 23, 1931. The bidders were to submit bids for the following:

70,000	pairs	Automobile plates
15,000	pairs	Truck plates
1,000	pairs	Commercial plates: Bus, Taxi & Driverless
500	pairs	Official plates
500	pairs	Highway Department plates
300	pairs	Dealer plates
250	pairs	U.S. Official plates
850	single	Trailer plates
250	single	Motorcycle plates
200	single	Sample plates
3,000	lot	Seals for Bus, Taxi & Driverless plates
6,000	lot	Rivets and riveter for seals

Five companies submitted proposals, and while the bids were tendered as prices for individual line items, the equivalent totals are summarized here:

<u>Company</u>	<u>Bid Amt</u>
Sachs-Lawlor Co., Denver, Colorado	\$ 9,218.88
C.H. Hanson Company, Chicago, Illinois	9,239.23
S.G. Adams Company, St. Louis, Missouri	9,472.13
Colorado Badge & Novelty Co., Denver, Colorado	10,058.63
Shwayder Trunk Company, Denver, Colorado	10,057.03

There were several differences between the bids in terms of quantities, etc., but the single most glaring discrepancy was that the Shwayder Trunk bid was for only 65,000 pairs of automobile plates, whereas all the other bidders gave figures for 70,000 pairs of plates. The Shwayder bid was already very nearly the highest of the five, and when the 5,000 missing pairs are taken into account their bid was far and away the most expensive.

Nonetheless, Lujan gave the deal to Shwayder instead of the low bidder, signing the contract on July 23, 1931. King Trione soon received his commission of \$1,200 from Shwayder, which he deposited to his account at the International State Bank in Raton on July 29, 1931.

## **The Loans**

In his position as the New Mexico State Comptroller, J.M. "Jake" Lujan was the person entrusted to manage the state's finances. One would suppose that a person in such a post would also be fiscally responsible in his personal life, but

such was apparently not the case. Between August 1930 and January 1931 Lujan took out three loans at Raton's International State Bank in the amounts of \$350, \$100 and \$200, with the bank holding the three notes. In short order Lujan found himself unable to make payments on the loans.

During this same general time period Lujan had written some checks which the bank had dishonored for reason of insufficient funds. By March 13, 1931, Lujan had apparently paid nothing toward either the principal or the interest on the loans and the bank wrote to him, insisting that he start paying off the notes at the rate of \$50 per month. Despite Lujan's assurances that he would pay off the loans in their entirety "soon," he paid nothing.

Joe DiLisio, the bank's president, knew that King Trione was a good friend of Lujan. On an occasion in early May 1931 when Trione happened to come into the bank, DiLisio took him aside and asked if he, Trione, might be able to talk to Lujan to help the bank in the collection of the Lujan debt. If this could not be accomplished, the bank would have to sue Lujan.

Trione implored the bank not to sue, saying that he would do his best to get Lujan to pay up. Trione was then in periodic contact with the bank, each time bringing news that Lujan would pay in "just a few days." Despite the assurances from both Lujan and Trione, the situation continued unchanged for the next two months.

Then on July 29, 1931, Trione entered the bank and deposited his \$1,200 license plate sales commission check from Shwayder. As soon as the deposit had been made, Trione used part of the money to buy Lujan's three loan notes from the bank, paying them off in full, including accrued interest, in the total amount of \$682.10. In other words, Jake Lujan now owed the money not to the bank, but to King Trione.

Upon buying the notes Trione took physical possession of them, though the bank would remain in the loop as escrow agent for any payments that might be made by Lujan. The following year, on February 24, 1932, Lujan sent \$388.50 to the bank as payment toward the loans now held by Trione. Trione declined \$21.40 of the payment, which was the amount of interest which had accrued during the period Trione had owned the notes, and that amount was returned to Lujan. The balance of \$367.10 was forwarded by the bank to Trione.

Trione marked "Paid" across the face of the notes, signed them, and returned them to the bank. The bank then forwarded the canceled notes to Lujan, notifying him that he was free of his indebtedness.

In spite of the fact that the notes had been retired and Lujan was off the hook, Trione had received only \$367.10 in return for notes he had bought the previous year for \$682.10, leaving \$315.00 unaccounted for. It was this amount that was later said to be the kickback from Trione to Lujan for steering the license plate and gadget contracts to Trione. (In the course of the coming investigation Trione and Lujan would both claim that the \$315.00 was subsequently paid back in a series of several cash payments, but neither of the men could produce any paperwork documenting any such payments.)

### **The “Gadgets”**

The state legislature had mandated that motor vehicle registration certificates be displayed in a container which would mutilate or destroy the certificate if anyone tried to remove it. This was done in an attempt to deter auto theft, and thereby lower auto insurance rates in New Mexico. A Denver man by the name of Straud K. Wood had invented and patented just such a device. (Wood would later boast that he was instrumental in getting the New Mexico legislature to pass the law that required their use.)

Trione approached Wood and offered to be his agent, for which he would receive a commission on the sale. Wood said that would be fine except that he had no manufacturing facilities. Trione said that he would facilitate an agreement for Shwayder Trunk to manufacture the “gadgets” at some given price, and the gadgets in turn would be offered to the state of New Mexico at a higher price. The difference would be Wood’s profit, out of which Trione would receive a commission. The two men agreed, and Shwayder offered to manufacture the containers for about 13 cents each.

When the AG interviewed Edna Trione the following year, she related that King had told her of the proposed “gadget deal” while the aforementioned discussions were in progress. King told her, she said, that “When I get this contract I will be on easy street. The commission is big, but when I get my part I’ll have to divide it with Jake and Fred Gould.” She asked, “Can you get the contract?”

“Hell yes,” King replied. “I bought Jake’s notes, hold them over his head and he’ll have to come through.”

The gadgets were not acquired through competitive bidding. Instead, Wood and Trione met with Lujan several times during September 1931, working up what amounted to a sole-source contract. The specifications in the contract called for the gadgets “to be designed as set forth in U.S. patent No. 1711191.”

This, of course, was the patent owned by Straud Wood, and no one else was licensed to use it.

On October 2, 1931, the contract was finalized and signed by Lujan as the buyer for the state of New Mexico, and Shwayder and Wood as the sellers. Shwayder would manufacture 80,000 of the gizmos and deliver them to Santa Fe on or before December 15, at a price of 28½ cents each, for a total of \$22,800.

Shwayder's profit was built into the 13 cent price they had agreed on with Wood. The 15½ cent difference between that and the selling price was Wood's profit, amounting to \$12,400. Out of that Wood paid Trione a commission of \$1,800, part of which, according to what Trione told his wife, went to a payoff to Lujan and Gould.

### **The Downfall**

Almost immediately Trione began worrying that someone would find out about his under-the-table dealings. He had already blabbed everything to his wife before she divorced him. Now she was steaming mad over his failure (or perhaps it was refusal) to pay the monthly alimony due her. Edna wasn't the only person King had told, but she was the one he was most worried about.

Between the time of the divorce on October 28, 1931, and Christmas of that year King pleaded with her numerous times to keep her mouth shut about the license plate and gadget contracts. Trione then tried bribery. At Christmas he gave Edna a diamond ring, saying, "Honey, I'm giving you this ring and I hope you'll have sense enough to keep your mouth shut about the license and gadget deals."

"He told me," she said, "that if the stories got out at Santa Fe about the licenses and the gadget deal, and if certain executives should get hold of the stories as they were, he would lose out entirely and lose what prestige he held since the last election a year ago last November, and that he certainly did not want me to put that out. Most of these things which he gave me were to keep me still and not to tell." [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, May 2, 1932, p.1, c.8, continued on p.2, c.1] (The election referred to was the one that brought Arthur Seligman to the Governor's office, and in turn, Jake Lujan to the Comptroller's office.)

Trione told Edna that if she didn't keep quiet he would get her son (Trione's stepson) fired from his job at the Highway Department. He said that he got Walter the job and he could take it away. She later quoted King as saying that he "was running the Highway Department and whatever he said, fire or hire, that they did it." This would have been a scary threat for anyone during the Depression when



jobs of any kind were scarce, but especially for Walter who was only 17 years old at the time.

As if that weren't enough, Trione arranged for Edna to take a trip to California, telling her, "I think there is going to be a lot of hell raised over this and I want you away from here where you can't testify in court." Edna did go to California, but by February (1932) had returned because the \$60 check King had given her for expenses proved to be worthless. After her return King threatened her physically several times to intimidate her into keeping her mouth zipped up.

By the time April rolled around Trione's long-suffering ex-wife had had enough and filed suit in District Court in Raton to recover the delinquent alimony. It was there that the beans were spilled and the newspapers picked up the story. The May 2, 1932, front pages of just about every paper in the state treated the public to all the sordid details.

Governor Seligman was left with no choice but to suspend Lujan that same day, and initiate the AG investigation which turned up all the dirt related above. As the investigation played out Lujan and Trione denied all of the allegations which had suggested any kind of kickback. "It's all politics. I swear I never gave Jake a lousy dime," insisted Trione. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 2, 1932, p.1, c.7]

Attorney General Neumann handed his report to the governor on May 24, 1932. Neumann's conclusion was that there was "nothing in the matters discovered upon which a criminal charge of any kind could be made against Mr. Lujan."

Based on the report's findings, Governor Seligman reinstated Lujan as State Comptroller on June 1, with back pay for the time of the suspension. [Letter from Governor Seligman to J.M. Lujan, June 1, 1932] Lujan, though, knew he was damaged goods, or as the AG had put it, "These matters, giving rise to such inferences, are ones which, however, will no doubt always be construed against Mr. Lujan by the public mind." Jake Lujan tendered his resignation the same day he was reinstated.

The next day Seligman appointed Juan N. Vigil (who until that time had been a member of the State Tax Commission) to replace Lujan as State Comptroller. [*Roswell Daily Record*, June 2, 1932, p.1, c.1]

Manuel Gallegos, the Motor Vehicle Commissioner, had never been implicated in any part of the scandal, but he, too, resigned. "I don't know why Gallegos resigned," said the governor. "I suppose it was because Jake quit as comptroller." Vigil quickly appointed Diego Salazar, an Española merchant, to replace Gallegos. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 3, 1932, p.1, c.2]

Fred Gould, the First Assistant State Comptroller, did not seem to be implicated by the investigative report either, but was mentioned within the report in the context of a conversation that Edna Trione had with Jake Lujan in February 1932: “Mrs. Trione made some remark of Mr. Gould losing his job, to which Mr. Lujan stated, ‘Yes, he did, and if King doesn’t keep his mouth shut, I’ll be in hot water, too.’” In spite of Trione having told Edna that he was paying off both Lujan and Gould, this quote is the only mention found in either the AG report or newspaper articles that references the firing of Gould. This conversation took place some two or three months before the scandal became public, so it seems unlikely that Gould’s firing was connected to it.

In his report Neumann’s primary conclusion was that “the name of King F. Trione appears in every phase of each transaction as the recipient of any advantage gained at any point in the progress thereof where any apparent irregularity occurs.” That appears to have been a fanciful way of saying that in his opinion Trione was, at best, a scalawag.

## Epilog

As far as is known, no one was prosecuted for any of the shenanigans surrounding the license plate and gadget contracts. On June 3, 1932, Governor Seligman told the press that “the investigation of the motor license plates and gadget deal is now a closed chapter.” [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 3, 1932, p.1, c.2]

That didn’t turn out to be quite the case, as by the end of June Attorney General Neumann had concluded that Lujan had had no authority to enter into the gadget contract in the first place, and, moreover, that the gadgets supplied didn’t meet the requirements of the New Mexico law. On July 13, 1932, Neumann dispatched a letter to Shwayder demanding refund of the entire amount paid.

[*Roswell Daily Record*, July 14, 1932, p.3, c.4] After two months of waiting there had been no response so on September 10, 1932, Neumann filed suit in Denver District Court against both Shwayder and Straud Wood in a move to recover the \$22,800 which had been paid to them. [*Clovis Evening News-Journal*, September 10, 1932, p.1, c.3]

The Attorney General’s 1933-1934 biennial report shows the disposition of the case as “dismissed,” but the reason for the dismissal is not given. [*Report of the Attorney General of New Mexico, January 1, 1933 to December 31, 1934*, p.20] Whatever the reason was, that seems to have been the final end of the gadget tale. (The state legislature had mandated the gadgets in an attempt to reduce auto theft, with the hope of reducing auto insurance rates in the state. Alas, insurance rates actually went up in 1932.

[*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, May 2, 1932, p.1, c.8])

By the time J.N. Vigil took over the Comptroller's office on June 2, 1932, the office was in such disarray that the Shwayder Trunk Company had not been paid for all the license plates it had delivered to the state prior to November 1, 1931. On May 20, 1932 (which was during the middle of the AG investigation), Maurice Shwayder wrote to Governor Seligman, pleading for payment of the then outstanding balance of \$4,000. [Letter from Maurice B. Shwayder, Shwayder Brothers, Inc., to Governor Arthur Seligman, May 20, 1932] There is no record of any action having been taken, probably because of the ongoing AG investigation.

The license plate contract contained a provision to the effect that should the state need additional plates during the year (1932), Shwayder would provide them at a price of 7½ cents per plate, and would do so within 20 days of receipt of each such order. By the middle of June the Motor Vehicle Department found itself in need of more motorcycle and trailer plates, but Shwayder refused to supply them until the outstanding bill was paid. [Las Vegas Daily Optic, June 15, 1932, p.2, c.2] The Comptroller ended up having to borrow money from the State Tax Commission to pay its own bills. [Santa Fe New Mexican, June 15, 1932, p.1, c.1, continued on p.2, c.5]

The judicial outcome of the alimony suit was that Judge Kiker ruled in favor of Edna Trione, ordering Mr. Trione to pay up delinquent alimony in the amount of \$68.20. [Clovis Evening News-Journal, May 2, 1932, p.1, c.3] Whether this was all he owed or just a part of it is not known. Free from King Trione, Edna Trione disappeared from the limelight and she does not appear to have shown up in the newspapers again. It would be interesting to know if King kept up the alimony payments, but history would have predicted that he did not.

In the midst of all the media hubbub over Lujan and Trione even Judge Kiker's integrity was called into question. District judges in New Mexico are elected officials and by definition are politicians. The *Albuquerque Journal* declared that it had information to the effect that Kiker had known about Trione holding Lujan's loan notes long before the information became public at the alimony trial. Kiker, the newspaper said, had allegedly been using this knowledge as leverage against his political rivals within the Democratic party, and the paper demanded an investigation into the judge's actions. [Roswell Daily Record, May 2, 1932, p.1, c.6, continued on p.3, c.3] Whether or not any investigation ever took place is unknown, as no further references to the allegations have been found in the historical record.

It turns out that Judge Kiker wasn't the only one who had earlier knowledge of what Trione had been up to. More than two months before the alimony trial William J. Barker, Chairman of the Democratic State Committee, wrote to Governor Seligman, giving him complete details of the Lujan loan notes that Trione had bought. [Letter, William J. Barker, Chairman, Democratic State Committee, to Governor Arthur Seligman, February 19, 1932] How Barker had these details is anyone's guess, but

Trione's propensity to brag undoubtedly was a contributing factor. The governor promptly wrote back to Barker, asking him whether "a wrong has been committed" and inquired, "what [do] you think is the best course to pursue?"

[Letter, Governor Arthur Seligman, to William J. Barker, Democratic State Committee Chairman, February 20, 1932]

No further correspondence has been found and it appears that the governor did nothing, losing an opportunity to douse a fire before it raged out of control.

Jake Lujan returned to his ranch in Des Moines and faded from the public eye. He had been raising sheep prior to his foray into Santa Fe politics, but by 1940 he had switched to cattle. His wife, Dolores, became postmistress, and they had a combined annual income of \$4,850—quite a substantial sum on the eve of World War II. [1930 U.S. Census and 1940 U.S. Census] Jake died in 1976 at the age of 80 and is buried in Fairmont Cemetery in Raton. [Fairmont Cemetery records, Raton, N.M.]

King Trione remarried on May 19, 1932, just when the uproar of the kickback scandal was at its loudest. His new bride, eleven years his junior, was Dera Kikk Flodung of San Luis, Colorado. [Colorado Statewide Marriage Index, 1853-2006] Their first child, James E. Trione, was born five months later, on October 7, 1932. [United States Social Security Death Index] King died in 1961 and is buried in the Mount Olivet Cemetery in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. [Mount Olivet Cemetery records, Wheat Ridge, Colorado]

# 1932 License Plate Purchase Contract

Reproduced below in its entirety is the 1932 N.M. license plate purchase contract.

## CONTRACT

This contract, made and entered into by and between the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company, a corporation of Denver, Colorado, party of the first part, and J.M. Lujan, State Comptroller of the State of New Mexico, party of the second part,

### WITNESSETH:

That, WHEREAS, the party of the second part advertised for bids to furnish certain motor vehicle license plates, a copy of which letter of advertisement requesting bids is hereto attached, marked Exhibit A, and made a part hereof, and,

WHEREAS, The Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company, by and through its duly authorized officers and lawful agents, on the fifteenth day of July, 1931, submitted a bid to furnish said motor vehicle license plates, a copy of which bid is hereto attached, marked Exhibit B, and made a part of this contract.

THAT, the parties hereto in consideration in the mutual covenants herein contained agree as follows:

The party of the first part agrees, and binds itself, to deliver F.O.B. Santa Fe, New Mexico, the following described motor vehicle license plates at the following prices:

<u>No.</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Price</u>
65,000	Passenger Plates	.1145 per pair
15,000	Truck Plates	.1145 per pair
1,000	Commercial Plates	.1145 per pair
200	Dealer's Plates	.1145 per pair
500	Trailer Plates	.07¼ each
250	Motorcycle Plates	.06½ each
100	National Guard Official Plates	.1145 per pair
500	Highway Department Plates	.1145 per pair
20	Staff Officers Plates	.1145 per pair
500	Official Plates	.1145 per pair
200	U.S., Official Plates	.1145 per pair
200	Sample Plates	.07½ each
2,500	Guest License Plates	.07½ each
	All duplicate Plates	.07½ each
3,000	Seals	\$174.00 for the
6,000	Rivets	lot of seals

The party of the first part further agrees to furnish and deliver duplicate plates or additional plates as ordered by the party of the second part at prices above stated, F.O.B. Santa Fe, New Mexico; all plates covered by this contract to be of twenty-four gauge steel U.S., made up in colors and sizes, and packed in printed envelopes ready for mailing, in strict accordance with the specifications contained in the letter of advertisement requesting bids, a copy of which is hereto attached and marked Exhibit A.

The party of the first part guarantees the enamel and material of all of said license plates to be of good quality and to last, under ordinary wear from January 1, 1932 to January 1, 1933.

IT IS FURTHER AGREED AND UNDERSTOOD that plates are to be packed in eighty (80) pound craft [*sic*] paper tension envelopes, either singly or in pairs, as case may be, and between the plates is to be placed a piece of oiled paper, to prevent the plates from sticking to one another, and on each envelope shall be printed rules (copy to be furnished by the Comptroller of State), and also, the serial numbers of the plate or plates contained therein. That all plates shall be safely packed in cartons containing twenty-five (25) or fifty (50) pairs of plates, the number to be at the option of the party of the first part, and that the cartons shall have plainly marked on the end thereof, the first and last numbers of the plates contained therein, and the cartons containing automobile plates shall be serially numbered, beginning with one (1); that the plates shall be packed serially in the cartons in consecutive order. Each carton shall be plainly marked on the end thereof with the name of the class of plates contained therein.

If, in the opinion of the Comptroller of State, too many mistakes appear in the packing of these plates, the Comptroller reserves the right to have all the plates in every county seat re-checked at the expense of the manufacturer and such expense shall be deductible from any payments due manufacturer.

Extra and additional plates shall be furnished at any time during the life of this contract within twenty (20) days from date of receipt of order.

The party of the first part further agrees to deliver said license plates (except duplicate or additional plates) at Santa Fe, New Mexico, on or before November 1, 1931, it being expressly understood that time shall be of the essence of this contract.

The party of the second part agrees to pay the party of the first part for said license plates at prices set forth above on or before January 15, 1932.

It is understood and agreed by and between the parties hereto that this contract is to be construed as though executed in whole in the state of New Mexico and in accordance with the laws of the state of New Mexico.

The party of the first part, as a guaranty of the faithful performance of the conditions of this contract upon his part, has made and executed a bond, which is tendered herewith, and a copy of which bond is attached to this contract and marked Exhibit C, said bond being in the penal sum of \$10,000.00.

The Customer's Draft in the sum of \$2,500.00, drawn by J.M. Lujan against the party of the first part and accepted by said party of the first part, and accompanying the bid of the party of the first part, is to be returned to the party of the first part upon the execution and delivery of the bond herein above mentioned and the approval thereof by the party of the second part.

IN WITNESS whereof the parties hereto have set their hands and affixed their seals this 23rd day of July, A.D. 1931.

THE SHWAYDER TRUNK MANUFACTURING COMPANY  
By Maurice B. Shwayder Sec.  
Party of the First Part

J.M. Lujan  
STATE COMPTROLLER OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
Party of the Second Part.

(SEAL)

#### NOTES:

Exhibit A, the Comptroller's bid solicitation, and Exhibit B, Shwayder's bid, have not been reproduced here because almost everything in them is contained within the final contract, above.

Exhibit C, the performance bond, was not attached to the contract found in Governor Seligman's papers, but contemporary news reports identify the bonding company as the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company. [*Roswell Daily Record*, July 9, 1932]

## 1932 “Gadget” Purchase Contract

Reproduced below in its entirety is the 1932 N.M. registration certificate holder purchase contract.

### CONTRACT

THIS AGREEMENT made and entered into by and between J.M. Lujan, State Comptroller of the State of New Mexico, hereinafter called the buyer, and STRAUD K. WOOD and the Shwayder Trunk Mfg. Company, a corporation, both of Denver, Colorado, hereinafter called the sellers, on this second day of October, A.D. 1931.

#### W I T N E S S E T H:

WHEREAS, under Section 5½ of Chapter 121, Session Laws of 1929, it is provided that whenever a motor vehicle is first registered the Motor Vehicle Department shall issue a suitable container with the certificate of registration issued for such vehicle, which container shall be so designated that the registration card may only be removed by mutilating or destroying the same; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary for the State Comptroller, in compliance with the law to make provision for the supplying of said containers as aforesaid.

NOW, THEREFORE, it is agreed between the parties hereto in consideration of the mutual covenants as follows:

The buyer agrees to purchase from the sellers and the sellers agree to sell to the buyer the aforesaid containers in such numbers and upon such terms and conditions as are hereinafter set forth;

All containers are to be designed as set forth in U.S. Patent No. 1711191, or as set forth in other later U. S. patents upon improvements of the device mentioned in said U.S. Patent No. 1711191, and shall comply with Section 5½ of Chapter 121, Session Laws of 1929.

All containers shall be made of steel and enameled black and shall have stamped on the face of said containers the words “New Mexico”, with the year and the number, all to be filled with white enamel; and the word “void” shall be stamped [on] the slide and shall be filled with white enamel.



Said containers shall be made as above stated except that they shall have a steel back and aluminum paint with all lettering filled with black enamel, at the option of the buyer.

A sample of each of the above described types of containers shall be submitted by the sellers to the buyer and the one selected by the buyer shall be attached hereto and made a part of this contract.

The aforesaid containers shall be packed in boxes or envelopes separately and in such manner that they may be mailed without breaking and with each of said containers the sellers shall furnish to the buyer one bolt, washer and wing nut for attaching said containers to the motor vehicle.

Instructions for the operation and attachment of said containers shall be printed upon each box or envelope in which said containers are packed.

The buyer agrees to pay the sellers for said containers at the price hereinafter set forth on or before January 15, 1932.

80,000 of said containers shall be delivered to the buyer at Santa Fe, New Mexico, on or before December 15, 1931, at a price of \$.28½ cents each, F.O.B. Santa Fe, New Mexico, time being of the essence of this contract.

The sellers further agree to furnish and deliver upon Thirty (30) days written notice to the buyer such additional containers as described above at the price above stated as the buyer may hereafter order.

The sellers also agree to furnish to the buyer without additional expense such furniture for the filing of the certificates to be used in said containers as is made necessary by change in size of certificate as well as 125,000 blank certificates.

The sellers agree to protect and save harmless the buyer and the State of New Mexico against any infringement suit or suits.

It is understood and agreed by and between the parties hereto that this contract is to be construed as though issued in whole in the State of New Mexico and in accordance with the Laws of the State of New Mexico. The sellers, as a guarantee of the faithful performance of the terms of this contract upon their part have made and executed a surety company bond in the penal sum of \$10,000.00 payable to the State of New Mexico and conditioned upon the faithful performance by the sellers of all of the terms and conditions of this contract, a copy of which bond is attached to this contract, marked Exhibit "A" and made a part hereof.

Pending the delivery of the aforesaid bond to the buyer, the sellers herewith tender to the buyer a certified check in the sum of \$500.00 payable to the buyer, which check is to be returned to the sellers provided said bond is delivered to the buyer as aforesaid within ten days from the date hereof; otherwise the buyer, at his option, may retain said check and apply the proceeds thereof as liquidated damages for the violation of this contract.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the parties hereto have set their hands and affixed their seals this 2nd day of October, A.D. 1931.

The Schwayder [ <i>sic</i> ] Trunk Mfg. Co.	<u>J.M. Lujan</u> State Comptroller of the State of New Mexico
By <u>Maurice B. Shwayder</u> Secretary (SEAL)	<u>Straud K. Wood</u> (SEAL)

**Note:** Exhibit A, the performance bond, was not attached to the contract found in Governor Seligman's papers.

## State Expenditures for Purchase of License Plates

Although the names of the manufacturers are not stated, we do find the following license plate cost figures in the biennial reports of the Secretary of State for the years 1912-1922, and the State Comptroller for the years 1925-1934. (As luck would have it, the Comptroller's report for the critical period of 1923-1924 has not been found.)

There is some inconsistency in the way the figures were reported from year to year, and with only one exception the number of plates purchased was not given. Keep in mind that most license plates intended for use in a given calendar year were actually purchased during the preceding calendar year, and that the figures below represent only years for which official data was found. For those entries where only the year is given (1919-1922), the publications are unclear as to whether the figures stated are for the calendar year or the fiscal year. Finally, note that in the first entry the word "Enamel" refers to enamel paint, not porcelain.

Aug. 15, 1912 to Nov. 30, 1912	1600 Enamel Automobile Tags	\$ 248.00
Dec. 1, 1912 to Nov. 30, 1913	Additional Tags	180.00
Dec. 1, 1913 to Nov. 30, 1914	Automobile and Motorcycle Tags	538.50
" "	Painting Auto Dealer's Tags & other expenses	529.81
Dec. 1, 1914 to Nov. 30, 1915	Automobile, motorcycle and dealers' tags	855.97
Dec. 1, 1915 to Nov. 30, 1916	Automobile, motorcycle and dealers' tags	1,451.50
Dec. 1, 1916 to Nov. 30, 1917	Automobile, motorcycle and dealers' tags	2,464.00
Dec. 1, 1917 to Nov. 30, 1918	Automobile, motorcycle and dealers' tags	2,826.45
1919	License plates	2,869.09
1919, chargeable against 1920	Freight and drayage on 1921 tags	578.16
1920	License Plates	7,229.07
1921	Tags and seals	3,948.39
1922	Tags and seals	4,028.91
FY 1925 (13th fiscal year)	Plates purchased	7,497.25
FY 1926 (14th fiscal year)	Plates purchased	6,437.36
Jul. 1, 1926 to Jun. 30, 1927	Plates and transportation	9,305.15
Year ending November 1931	License Plates	7,893.93
Year ending November 1932	License Plates	8,573.52
21st Fiscal Year (FY 1933)	License Plates	7,976.27
22nd Fiscal Year (FY 1934)	License Plates	8,020.77

## **Photographs for this Chapter**

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/Manufacturers.htm>

# New Mexico's Motor Vehicle Records

New Mexico's early registrations were recorded by hand in pen-and-ink in large ledger books. Beginning about 1914, typeset books of the data contained in the ledgers were published periodically for the benefit of law enforcement agencies. (A useful feature of the handwritten ledgers is that the exact date of issue is shown for every license plate. Unfortunately, this information was not carried forward into the printed books that were derived from the ledgers.)

Although easier to read, a problem with the printed books was that they were accurate only on the day they were printed. Within an extremely short time additional registrations had occurred, making the printed book already out of date.

The solution to this was that an initial book would be published during the first half of the year—typically no later than July 1—then (at least in some years), supplements would be printed and sent out later. The 1919 motor vehicle law (effective January 1, 1920), Sec. 8, established this as a formal requirement:

“The Secretary of State, shall on or before the first day of July of each year make out and mail to the sheriff of each county in this state, a full and accurate list in alphabetical and numerical order of all motor vehicles so registered, stating the distinctive number so assigned to each, the name of the manufacturer and the engine number, together with the name and residence or business address of the owner or dealer, and at the expiration of every sixty days thereafter a supplemental list of the additional registrations or changes in registration...”

Although I have seen a number of the initial books, and have some of them in my own archives, the supplements are rarely seen. My hunch is that because the original books were bound, the supplements were hard to use and may have been considered nuisances which got discarded early on. In any case, until July 1 of each year law enforcement agencies were completely in the dark regarding motor vehicle registration information.

In 1939 the initial book was published in loose leaf form, such that the pages from the supplements could be inserted in all the right places (passenger, truck, motorcycle, dealer, etc.). Why this was not done in all years is unknown, but in 1940, when the Motor Vehicle Division announced its intention to revert to the bound volumes, the New Mexico Peace Officers' Association took their protest all the way to Governor Miles in an attempt to retain the loose leaf style.

[*Albuquerque Journal*, January 13, 1940, p.2, col. 2.]

By 1932 these printed books had taken on the name “*The Zia Book – New Mexico Automobile License Directory*,” and according to the *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. XXIV, 1949, were published at least through 1945. As the years progressed and motor vehicles increased in number, it was necessary to print the Zia Book in multiple volumes each year. By the late 1930s, it took at least four volumes of several hundred pages each, plus supplements, to contain all of the registrations for each year. The supplements, of course, also contained lists of licenses that were transferred to new owners since the previous edition came out.

Often seen in the License Directories are notations beside blocks of plates which say “See Supplement.” These appear to be plates which had been manufactured, though not yet issued at the time the initial book was published, but which were expected to be issued by the time the supplement(s) came out. (If only we could find more of the supplements!) This premise is supported to some extent by the fact that when I look up the serial numbers of known unissued plates in the license directories, I usually find that they fall within these “See Supplement” blocks, meaning that not only had they not yet been issued, but they never did get issued later in the year.

A puzzling aspect of the *Motor Vehicle Register 1928* is that the ethnicity of some, but not all, Native Americans is included in the registration listings. The majority of such registrations are clustered in the northwest corner of the state, where Navajo, Zuni, and Ute Mountain reservations are located. One typical listing is this one:

27194    Ha to Chi Nez, (Indian), Tohatchi, 1923 Buick touring, 942176, 2520 lbs

This may have been done so that the reader, upon encountering an unfamiliar name, would know that it was not a misprint. (Not only are many of these names likely to be unknown to outsiders, but in some cases the person has but one name.) A few examples from the 1928 *Register* are these:

Red Mule, Halgot Yazzie, Werito, Navajo Charlie, Bobelu, Casa Appa, Hastene Nez, John Roan Horse, Atizee Begay, Chan Tel Begay, Tow Jolui and Jim Silent Man.

The names Begay, Yazzie and Nez are among the most common family names of Native Americans in this region, but not all persons with these names are designated as “Indian.” Consequently, the reason for the designations that we do see remains an open question.

All of the early registration records—both the handwritten ledgers and the typeset books alike—are arranged with the entries in numerical order according to license plate number. This makes it exceedingly difficult to look up information by the name of the owner.

The 1919 law explicitly states that “Upon the receipt of an application for registration of a motor vehicle ..., the Secretary ... shall alphabetically and also numerically register and correctly index such motor vehicle with the name, residence and business address of the owner...” and further that “The Secretary of State, shall on or before the first day of July of each year make out and mail to the sheriff of each county in this state, a full and accurate list in alphabetical and numerical order of all motor vehicles so registered...”

Notwithstanding this statutory requirement that both alphabetical and numerical lists were to be provided, I have seen only a few alphabetical lists. One example is a list found in the 1922 Doña Ana County records, where all automobiles in the county were recorded for property tax assessment purposes.

[*Doña Ana County Records, Automobil[e] Record for 1922.*] This particular tabulation could have been transcribed from data originally compiled at the state level, however, as it was necessary to create a record of this type in order to calculate the apportionment of licensing fees to the respective counties for use by their road departments.

Only a very few of the state’s original county-by-county compilations are known to survive, one being the record for 1915, which is in a large handwritten ledger similar to the one used for the regular registration records that year. The entries are recorded in alphabetical order by county, but within each county the entries are in chronological order by date of issue, such that motorcycle and dealer licenses are interleaved with the autos. The license fees collected are sub-totaled on each page, and then totaled for each county. (See more on this subject, below.)

Perhaps they were no different from vehicle owners in other states, but New Mexicans were notorious scofflaws when it came to registering their motor vehicles. Indeed, when the state’s first highway patrol was formed in 1933, the fines and fees collected from unregistered vehicles alone more than paid for the entire operating cost of the police force! The point of this is that official registration records show only the vehicles belonging to the law-abiding segment of the population; exactly how many were on the other side of the fence will never be known, but it was enough to keep state officials pulling their hair out for years to come.

New Mexico’s automobile licensing law in 1912 failed to address a number of important issues, one of which was what to do when a vehicle changed ownership. This particular matter was taken up in the 1913 law, which provided that upon transfer of ownership the seller was to immediately provide to the Secretary of State the name of the buyer. The buyer in turn was to pay a transfer fee of one dollar. The law further provided that “the Secretary of State shall note such change of ownership upon the registration book or index, and the vendee shall be allowed to use such license and number until expiration.” [*1913 Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 19, Sec. 9]

(In my own archives I have copies of several such transfer requests from 1917, each one of which was in the form of a letter to the Secretary of State. Each letter mentions the enclosure of a check or Post Office Money Order in the amount of one dollar, in payment of the transfer fee.)

During those days automobiles changed hands far less often than they do today, but the early handwritten ledgers do indeed show the occasional transfer, along with the name and address of the new owner written between the lines, and notation of the \$1 fee having been paid. The upshot of this was that the license plate belonged to the car, not to the owner. The plate didn't come off the car until it expired and was replaced by the next year's plate.

This policy remained unchanged until April 1, 1979, when the Motor Vehicle Division implemented a "plate-to-owner" system, wherein the original owner kept the plate, and the new owner was issued a new plate. [1978 New Mexico License Plates, TMV-10263, June 1978, p. 11] About the only exception to this was in the 1952 law which authorized the issuance of amateur ("ham") radio plates beginning in 1953. Since the plates bore the owner's radio call sign issued by the Federal Communications Commission, a special provision was enacted to ensure that those plates went with the owner, not the car. [1953 Laws of New Mexico, Chapter 91, Approved March 20, 1953; and Albuquerque Journal, January 14, 1956, p.2, c.5] (Political plates, such as those issued to state legislators and the governor, were another exception.)

For many years New Mexico treated automobiles as taxable personal property and the Assessors of each county collected property tax on them in the same fashion as they did for real property. Indeed, the early motor vehicle license laws made it clear that the "license fee shall be in addition to the ordinary property tax." [1912 Laws of New Mexico, Chapter 28, Sec. 3] Later laws even required the vehicle owner to present his tax receipt as proof the tax had been paid before the vehicle could be registered. [e.g., 1925 Laws of New Mexico, Chapter 82, § 8.]

Both the state and the county governments had a vested interest in all this. The 1912 law required that the county assessors report the names of all automobile owners on their property tax rolls, which served as a means to identify anyone evading the license law. In return, the state provided to the counties a tabulation of registrations in each county, which served as a cross-check for anyone who might be evading the property tax assessment. The county registration lists prepared by the state also had a tally of the total fees collected from the automobile owners in each county. [e.g., Automobile Record A, 1915, for each county]

In these early years the license fees were applied primarily to the state and county road funds, so there was the matter of dividing up the monies. In the beginning, essentially all of the money went straight into the State Road Fund [1912 Laws, Sec. 3] (although the state also separately allocated money to the counties for various other purposes).



In the 1923 laws the allocation was explicitly codified to pay two-thirds of the collected monies to the State Road Fund, with the remaining one-third to “be paid over by the State Treasurer to the County Treasurers of the several counties in proportion to the fees paid by the owners residing in each county to be credited to the County Road Fund of each county to be used for maintenance of county roads.” [1923 Laws, Sec. 15]

The gist of all this is that there are early automobile registration and property tax records residing at the county level throughout the state, though these are even more difficult to find than the ones at the state level.

Registration records are known to survive for the following years, with originals or copies of all of them in the author’s archives:

**1912-1916** Complete records survive for all of these years.

**1918, 1920, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1926-1928, 1931-1938** Partial records survive for these years. In most cases these are mid-year records lacking third and/or fourth quarter new registrations, but in some cases the records survive for only some types of vehicles (e.g., cars and trucks, but not other non-passenger registrations).

The number of copies of the registration books that were printed each year is unknown, but it was probably not more than a few hundred. The Comptroller reported a cost of \$1,455.00 for printing the 300-page 1927 book, but without stating the number printed. [Comptroller Department ... Biennial Report for the 15th and 16th Fiscal Years ... Gilberto Mirabal, Comptroller, p. 28. (FY 1927 and FY 1928)]

A considerable amount of progress has been accomplished in tracking down New Mexico motor vehicle registration records, but we are still in need of license directories and registration records for many of the years. If you have any that you would like to donate or sell, or if you know where any can be found, please contact the author at:

New Mexico Transportation History Project  
Attn: Bill Johnston  
P.O. Box 1  
Organ, NM 88052-0001

Tel. 575-382-7804  
Primary e-mail: NMhistory@totacc.com  
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## **The Digitization Project**

As described earlier, only a few alphabetical registration listings are known to survive from New Mexico's early registration records, and those are at the county level (e.g., 1918 for San Miguel County and 1922 for Doña Ana County). Not a single one of the state-wide alphabetical compilations mandated by the 1919 state law has yet been found. Consequently, the only practical use that can be made of the early records is to look up information by license plate number. Finding a vehicle owner by name, for example, is next to impossible.

This limitation was the impetus several years ago to begin digitizing all of the registration records from this period. The process is excruciatingly time-consuming and expensive. Digitization of the handwritten 1912-1913 automobile records alone took weeks to accomplish and cost well over a thousand dollars for just those two years. Fortunately, the printed records (both typeset and mimeographed) have been digitized much more easily through the use of modern scanning equipment which converts the printed pages directly to searchable PDF files.

Once digitized, the utility of the records is greatly increased. I can now accomplish tasks in seconds which in the past would have taken days, or would have been totally impossible. Not only can I do such things as look up owners by name, or track specific vehicles from year to year by serial number, but I can perform powerful statistical analyses of the data. Examples of just a few of the possibilities are seen in the charts appearing in the "Motorcycle" chapter, and in the latter part of the chapter on "First Issues."

Beginning on the next page is a detailed index of all New Mexico motor vehicle registration records known to survive today, hard copies of which the New Mexico Transportation History Project has secured for its own archives. These hard copies have in turn also been digitized as fully searchable electronic computer files.

**Index**  
**of all known surviving**  
**New Mexico motor vehicle registration records**  
**All of these have been digitized into fully searchable electronic format.**

- 1912 All plates.** These were numbered 1 to 904, which includes both Cars and Trucks.
- 1913 Regular plates:** All that were issued. These were numbered 905 to 1998, which includes both Cars and Trucks.  
**Dealers:** All. Numbered 1 to 23.  
**Motorcycles:** All. Numbered 1 to 177.
- 1914 Regular plates:** All that were issued. These were numbered 1 to 3090, which includes all Cars and Trucks.  
**Dealers:** All. Numbered 24 to 102.  
**Motorcycles:** All. Numbered 1 to 179.
- 1915 Regular plates:** All that were issued. These were numbered 1 to 5000, which includes all Cars and Trucks.  
**Dealers:** All. Numbered 1 to 80.  
**Motorcycles:** All. Numbered 1 to 376.
- 1916 Regular plates:** All that were issued. These were numbered 1 to 8228, which includes Cars and Trucks.  
**Dealers:** All. Numbered 1 to 128.  
**Motorcycles:** All. Numbered 1 to 364.
- 1917** There are no known surviving records for this year.
- 1918 Regular plates:** All that were issued from the beginning of the year to May 8, 1918. This includes plates 1 to 15000, and includes both Cars and Trucks.
- 1919** There are no known surviving records for this year.

- 1920 Regular plates:** All that were issued from the beginning of the year to May 15, 1920. This includes plates 1 to 18000, and includes both Cars and Trucks as both received the same type of plate. Plates issued after May 15, i.e., numbers 18001 to approximately 22070, which were renewed in 1923 can be found in the 1923 records (applies to Motorcycle and Dealer plates as well).
- Dealers:** Numbered 1 to 143.
- Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 161.
- 1921** There are no known surviving records for this year. However, a 1921 plate that was renewed in 1923 can be found in the 1923 records (applies to Motorcycle and Dealer plates as well).
- 1922 Regular plates:** New-issue plates that were issued from roughly the middle of the year to the end of the year, and includes both Cars and Trucks, as both received the same type of license plate. These are numbered from 33001 to 37411, and include both Cars and Trucks, as both received the same type of license plate. Plates issued earlier in the year that were renewed in 1923 can be found in the 1923 records (applies to Motorcycle and Dealer plates as well).
- 1923 Regular plates:** All plates issued from the beginning of the year to July 1, 1923. These are numbered 37412 to 45899, and include both Cars and Trucks, as both received the same type of license plate. All plates originally issued in 1920, 1921, and 1922 that were renewed in 1923 by July 1 are also included. This includes seal (tab) numbers 1 to 17999. Since renewals had to be accomplished very early in the year, essentially all 1923 renewals are included.
- Dealers:** Numbered 1 to 261. Includes plates from 1920 through 1922 that were renewed in 1923, but those which were not renewed in 1923 are omitted.
- Motorcycles:** Numbered 2 to 451. Includes plates from 1920 through 1922 that were renewed in 1923, but those which were not renewed in 1923 are omitted.
- 1924 Regular plates:** All issued from the beginning of the year to June 1, 1924. This includes plates 1 to 33000, which includes both Cars and Trucks, as they received the same type of plate.
- Commercial Cars:** Plates issued from the beginning of the year to June 1, 1924. This includes plates 1 to 422.
- Commercial Trucks:** Plates issued from the beginning of the year to June 1, 1924. This includes plates 1 to 880.

**Dealers:** Plates issued from the beginning of the year to June 1, 1924. This includes plates 1 to 88.

**Motor Trucks:** Plates issued from the beginning of the year to June 1, 1924. This includes plates 1 to 103.

**Motorcycles:** Plates issued from the beginning of the year to June 1, 1924. This includes plates 1 to 178.

**1925** There are no known surviving records for this year.

**1926** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following:

**Regular plates:** Numbered 1 to 50900, which includes both Cars and Trucks, as they received the same type of plates.

**Commercial Cars and Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 2100.

**Motor Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 99.

**Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 163.

**1927** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following:

**Regular plates:** Numbered 1 to 54604, which includes both Cars and Trucks, as they received the same type of plates.

**Commercial Cars and Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 1559.

**Motor Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 134.

**Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 176.

**Trailers:** Numbered 1 to 131.

**1928** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following:

**Regular plates:** Numbered 1 to 64500, which includes both Cars and Trucks, as they received the same type of plates.

**Commercial Cars and Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 2100.

**Dealers:** Numbered D-1 to D-199

**Motor Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 201.

**Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 172, plus 245, 250, and 263.

**1929** There are no known surviving records for this year.

**1930** There are no known surviving records for this year.

- 1931** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following, plus some Supplements:
- Cars:** Numbered 1 to 56900.
  - Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 15199.
  - Commercial (Taxi, Bus, Driverless):** Numbered 1 to 299.
  - Dealers:** Numbered D-1 to D-136
  - Driverless (in addition to above):** Approximately 37 plates within the range 38852 to 69547 were also issued to Driverless cars.
  - Highway Department:** Numbered 1 to 499.
  - Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 199.
  - Official:** Numbered 1 to 399.
  - Staff Officer:** Numbered X-1 to X-99.
  - Trailer:** Numbered 1 to 699.
  - U.S. Official:** Numbered 1 to 199.
- 1932** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following, plus some Supplements:
- Cars:** Numbered 1 to 25000.
- 1933** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following, plus some Supplements:
- Cars:** Numbered 0 to 25000 and 50001 to 59423.
  - Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 15550.
  - Dealers (new car):** Numbered D-1 to D-99.
  - Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 225.
  - Non-Passenger (other):** Available for most other types, including Commercial (Bus, Taxi, Driverless), Dealer (used car), Governor, Lt. Governor, Highway Department, National Guard Officer, Official, U.S. Official, Staff Officer, and Trailer).
- 1934** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following:
- Cars:** Numbered 0 to 64400.
  - Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 15000.
  - Dealers:** Numbered D-1 to D-108.
  - Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 252.
  - Non-Passenger (other):** Available for most other types, including

Commercial (Bus, Taxi, Driverless), Dealer (used car), Governor, Lt. Governor, Highway Department, National Guard Officer, Official, U.S. Official, Staff Officer, and Trailer).

- 1935** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following:

**Cars:** Numbered 25001 to 73873.

**Trucks:** Numbered 5001 to 19000.

**Dealers:** Numbered D-1 to D-125.

**Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 284.

**Non-Passenger (other):** Available for most other types, including Commercial (Bus, Taxi, Driverless), Dealer (used car), Governor, Lt. Governor, Highway Department, National Guard Officer, Official, U.S. Official, Staff Officer, and Trailer).

- 1936** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following, plus some Supplements:

**Cars:** Numbered 30001 to 80000.

**Trucks:** Numbered 5001 to 21000.

**Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 314.

**Dealers:** Numbered D-1 to D-150.

**Non-Passenger (other):** Available for most other types, including Commercial (Bus, Taxi, Driverless), Dealer (used car), Governor, Lt. Governor, Highway Department, National Guard Officer, Official, U.S. Official, Staff Officer, and Trailer).

- 1937** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following:

**Cars:** Numbered 60001 to 89582.

**Trucks:** Numbered 15001 to 26000.

**Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 342.

**Dealers:** Numbered D-1 to D-154.

**Non-Passenger (other):** Available for most other types, including Commercial (Bus, Taxi, Driverless), Dealer (used car), Governor, Lt. Governor, Highway Department, National Guard Officer, Official, U.S. Official, Salesman, Staff Officer, and Trailer).

**1938** The registration book is undated but was probably published about mid-year and includes the following, plus some Supplements:

**Cars:** Numbered 0 to 89710.

**Trucks:** Numbered 1 to 28176.

**Motorcycles:** Numbered 1 to 331.

**Dealers:** Numbered D-1 to D-150.

**Non-Passenger (other):** Available for most other types, including Commercial (Bus, Taxi, Driverless), Dealer (used car), Governor, Lt. Governor, Highway Department, National Guard Officer, Official, U.S. Official, Salesman, Staff Officer, and Trailer).

**1939-Present** With the exception of the 1954 Dealer registrations given immediately below, there are no known surviving records for any of these years.

**1954 Dealers:** Numbered D-1 to D-255. These also include all of the multi-plate registrations (i.e., 1D, 2D, 3D, 4D, etc., prefixes).

## Photographs for this Chapter

In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text.

When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the following link: <https://NMplates.com/MotorVehicleRecords.htm>



# Registration Statistics

Not only did New Mexico maintain its own motor vehicle registration records, but the federal government collected registration statistics from all states beginning in the late 1800s. It was the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and its predecessors which compiled these statistics under the following series of names, as related in the agency's organizational history, *Highway Existence - 100 Years and Beyond*, by Richard F. Weingroff:

- October 3, 1893    Office of Road Inquiry (ORI), created under Department of Agriculture.
- October 23, 1899    Renamed as Office of Public Road Inquiries (OPRI), under Department of Agriculture.
- March 3, 1905    Renamed Office of Public Roads (OPR), under Department of Agriculture.
- July 1, 1918    Renamed as Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), under Department of Agriculture.
- July 1, 1939    Renamed as Public Roads Administration (PRA), under Federal Works Administration.
- August 20, 1949    Again named Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), this time under Department of Commerce.
- April 1, 1967    Renamed as Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), now under U.S. Department of Transportation.

New Mexico did not preserve many of its early registration records, and in spite of the existence of federal tallies, accurate figures for New Mexico's annual motor vehicle registration numbers are not easy to come by. In many cases the numbers recorded by the federal government during the early years of the twentieth century were estimates, as evidenced by the fact that the data are all very round numbers. On the other hand, their numbers are believed to be quite accurate for later years.

The table and graphs in this section are composites of federal figures and, where we have them, exact figures from actual New Mexico sources. These are footnoted and explained to the greatest extent possible within the table itself.

## License Plate Sales Figures

Beginning with 1930, the Comptroller's biennial reports contain tables giving specific figures for sales of each type of license plate. The reader will note some discrepancies between the figures in these tables and those provided by the federal Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) in the later comprehensive spreadsheet. Most of the difference is due to the fact that the BPR figures are based on calendar years, while the Comptroller figures (except for 1930) are based on fiscal years.

The numbers in the Comptroller tables are for *pairs* of plates, not individual plates. In other words, the Comptroller figures correspond to the number of registrations, as do the BPR figures.

### Plate Sales for the Year 1930

	Plates Purchased	Plates Issued	Plates Cancelled	Balance on hand Dec. 30, 1930
Passenger cars	75,000	63,211	252	11,537
Trucks	15,000	14,224	84	692
Bus and Taxi	1,000	366	6	628
Trailers	500	455	10	35
Motorcycles	250	212	5	33
State Officials	1,000	782	8	210
U.S. Officials	400	187	2	211
Dealers	<u>300</u>	<u>166</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>134</u>
<b>Totals:</b>	93,450	79,603	367	13,480

Source of 1930 table: *Biennial Report of the Comptroller's Department ... for the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Fiscal Years, R.F. Asplund, State Comptroller, p. 17.* (FY 1929 and FY 1930)

### Number of License Plates Sold 1931-1934

	1931	1932	1933	1934
Passenger License Plates	59,320	61,077	61,976	67,420
Truck License Plates	15,162	14,928	15,311	15,873
Bus License Plates	363	293	289	303
Trailer License Plates	796	587	968	907
Motorcycle License Plates	201	233	282	266
Dealer License Plates	135	94	88	109
State Official License Plates	381	374	358	453
U.S. Official License Plates	99	99	143	200
Staff Official License Plates	23	13	15	11
Lt. Governor License Plates	--	1	1	--
Guest License Plates	--	316	--	--
National Guard License Plates	--	64	66	65
Highway Dept. License Plates	493	500	500	500
Special License Plates	<u>--</u>	<u>--</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
<b>Totals:</b>	76,973	78,579	79,999	86,110

**Note:** No information is given as to what the "Special License Plates" are, but Secretary of State and Speaker of the House are likely possibilities.

Source of 1931-1932 table: *Biennial Report of the Comptroller's Department ... for the Nineteenth and Twentieth Fiscal Years*, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 34. (FY 1931 and FY 1932)

Source of 1933-1934 table: *Biennial Report of the State Comptroller for the Twenty-First and Twenty-Second Fiscal Years*, Juan N. Vigil, State Comptroller, p. 131. (FY 1933 and FY 1934)

Other, less detailed, tables of registration statistics can be found in various publications of the Bureau of Revenue, which absorbed the Comptroller's Department (and, hence, the Motor Vehicle Division) in February 1935. All of these, though, are based on fiscal years, or, worse, on arbitrary time periods.

Diego Salazar, the Motor Vehicle Commissioner, for instance, published a memorandum on June 8, 1937 which provided figures for the numbers of various types of license plates issued through May 31 of 1936 and 1937. [*Revenue Collected and License Plates Issued to May 31st, 1936-1937, Motor Vehicle Division, Bureau of Revenue, June 8, 1937*] This falls short of the then-fiscal year by a full month, making it nigh impossible to reconcile the figures with either the fiscal or the calendar years.

The Bureau of Revenue biennial report for fiscal years 1949 and 1950 has tables for nine years, 1942 through 1950, inclusive (again, somewhat less detailed than those shown above for 1931-1934). [*State of New Mexico Report of Bureau of Revenue for the Biennium July 1, 1949 to June 30, 1950*] The high year-on-year growth in motor vehicle registrations (except during the war years) causes the figures for a given fiscal year to be significantly lower than for the corresponding calendar year. Consequently, most people will find the figures given in the comprehensive table on the following pages more useful, as these are calendar year statistics which correlate much more closely to the years embossed on the license plates themselves.

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## New Mexico Motor Vehicle Registrations by Year

New Mexico Motor Vehicle Registrations by Year														
Privately Owned & Commercially Owned						State & Federal Government Vehicles								
Year	Cars	Trucks	Buses	Trailers	Motor-Cycles	State Vehicles	Federal Vehicles	State Trailers	Federal Trailers	State M/C	Federal M/C	Total	Year	Notes
1900	10											10	1900	OPRI estimate.
1901	10											10	1901	OPRI estimate.
1902	20											20	1902	OPRI estimate.
1903	30											30	1903	OPRI estimate.
1904	60											60	1904	OPRI estimate.
1905	80											80	1905	OPR estimate.
1906	120											120	1906	OPR estimate.
1907	140											140	1907	OPR estimate.
1908	220											220	1908	OPR estimate.
1909	320											320	1909	OPR estimate.
1910	470	10										480	1910	OPR estimate.
1911	640	20										660	1911	OPR estimate.
1912	904	60										964	1912	NMMVR, 1912-1914. Cars includes trucks. Trucks are OPR estimate.
1913	1,895	3			177							2,075	1913	NMMVR, 1912-1914. Includes re-regs from 1912. Cars+trks = 1,898 exact
1914	2,910	180			334							3,424	1914	NMMVR, 1912-1914. Cars + trucks = 3,090, exact figure. Trucks OPR est.
1915	4,650	350			376							5,376	1915	NMMVR, 1915. Cars + trucks = 5,000, exact figure. Trucks OPR estimate.
1916	7,628	600			364							8,592	1916	NMMVR, 1916. Cars + trucks = 8,228, exact figure. Trucks OPR estimate.
1917	15,250	1,000			311							16,561	1917	OPR. Trucks are OPR estimate. Motorcycles are interpolated.
1918	16,130	1,450			258							17,838	1918	OPR. Trucks are OPR estimate. Motorcycles are interpolated.
1919	15,634	2,450			205							18,289	1919	BPR. Trucks are BPR estimate. Motorcycles are interpolated.
1920	18,950	3,050			150							22,150	1920	SOS announcement in news media. Motorcycles are estimate.
1921	19,155	3,404			152							22,711	1921	Total is SOS figure. Breakdown is BPR, but probably from SOS
1922	20,934	4,500			169							25,603	1922	SOS announcement in news media, adjusted to Dec 31. M/C est'd
1923	23,888	5,300			186							29,374	1923	NMMVR, 1923, adjusted to December 31.
1924	35,380	6,300			178							41,858	1924	BPR. NMHJ gives 41,660 total. Trucks BPR est. M/Cs NMMVR.
1925	42,122	6,900	89		191							49,302	1925	BPR. NMHJ gives 49,108 total. Trucks BPR est. M/Cs interpolated.
1926	47,416	7,500	80	143	205							55,344	1926	BPR. NMHJ gives 54,996 total. Trucks BPR est. Trlr & M/C NMHJ
1927	50,858	8,450	83	185	210							59,786	1927	BPR. NMHJ gives 59,291 total. Trucks BPR est. Trlr & M/C NMHJ
1928	56,342	9,300	95	272	263							66,272	1928	BPR. NMHJ gives 68,739 total. Trucks BPR est. M/Cs NMMVR.
1929	66,652	11,650	72	359	227							78,960	1929	BPR. Trucks are BPR estimate. Motorcycles & Trailers are interpolated.
1930	70,250	13,700	200	446	191							84,787	1930	BPR. Trucks are BPR estimate. Motorcycles & Trailers are interpolated.
1931	65,084	15,884	357	639	155							82,119	1931	BPR. Motorcycles & Trailers are NMMVR.
1932	61,713	15,020	139	674	178							77,724	1932	BPR. Motorcycles & Trailers are interpolated.
1933	61,065	15,290	288	708	202					10		77,563	1933	BPR. M/Cs & Trailers are NMMVR, Govt M/Cs are NMMVR for NMMP
1934	66,606	16,112	182	884	252					10		84,046	1934	BPR. Motorcycles & Trailers are NMMVR.
1935	73,837	18,245	375	1,679	276					10		94,422	1935	BPR. Motorcycles & Trailers are interpolated.

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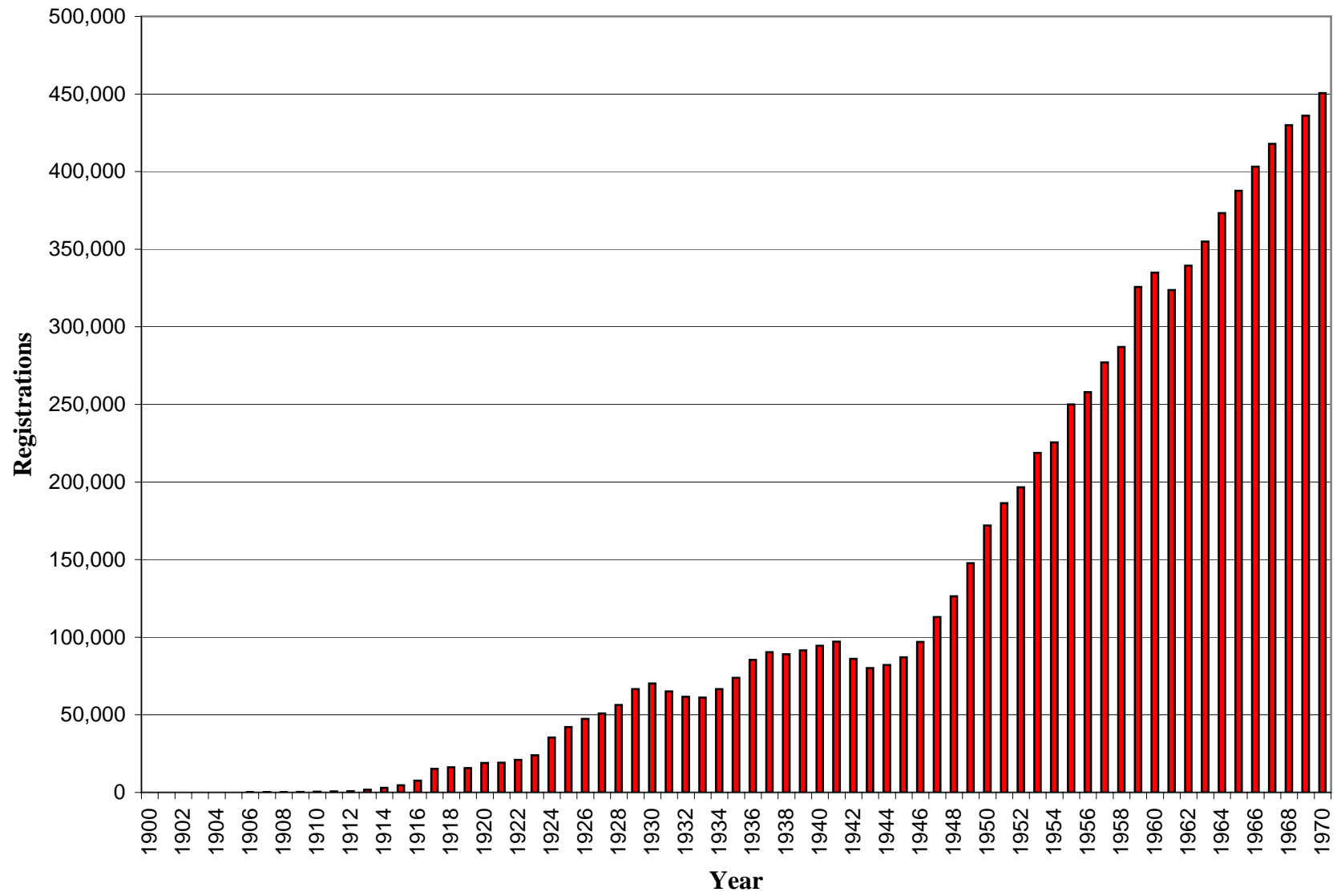
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# Federal Highway Administration Registration Statistics for New Mexico, 1971-2018

						Motor-			
	Year	Cars	Trucks	Buses	Trailers	cycles	Total	Year	
	1971	465,557	192,665	2,907	78,159	27,437	766,725	1971	
	1972	499,693	207,998	3,074	90,237	29,787	830,789	1972	
	1973	503,080	218,751	3,806	95,773	31,217	852,627	1973	
	1974	532,493	227,403	3,556	91,294	33,622	888,368	1974	
	1975	554,578	268,387	3,603	76,073	35,263	937,904	1975	
	1976	592,640	287,264	3,742	78,845	37,699	1,000,190	1976	
	1977	593,400	310,008	3,660	81,944	38,885	1,027,897	1977	
	1978	641,219	344,018	3,688	92,232	42,691	1,123,848	1978	
	1979	665,997	361,059	3,797	96,778	46,947	1,174,578	1979	
	1980	686,626	377,395	3,714	97,211	50,727	1,215,673	1980	
	1981	684,667	359,634	3,635	99,384	51,912	1,199,232	1981	
	1982	779,944	409,734	3,483	114,069	60,367	1,367,597	1982	
	1983	798,398	434,369	3,775	124,028	54,776	1,415,346	1983	
	1984	761,071	444,339	3,829	125,165	50,245	1,384,649	1984	
	1985	746,068	425,859	3,774	114,656	45,024	1,335,381	1985	
	1986	828,715	487,586	3,820	135,424	46,241	1,501,786	1986	
	1987	802,823	478,501	3,382	132,500	41,407	1,458,613	1987	
	1988	788,415	474,729	3,416	128,264	37,494	1,432,318	1988	
	1989	805,599	485,495	3,427	134,586	35,890	1,464,997	1989	
	1990	806,207	491,639	3,416	134,868	33,464	1,469,594	1990	
	1991	824,490	492,597	3,401	134,522	32,083	1,487,093	1991	
	1992	837,707	510,544	3,444	138,502	31,167	1,521,364	1992	
	1993	855,920	561,321	3,412	104,324	31,244	1,556,221	1993	
	1994	734,634	684,404	3,402	108,951	30,875	1,562,266	1994	
	1995	832,075	648,217	3,435	116,337	31,180	1,631,244	1995	
	1996	772,175	768,981	3,477	121,903	31,578	1,698,114	1996	
	1997	779,596	731,361	3,542	126,590	31,392	1,672,481	1997	
	1998	821,031	770,129	3,632	131,167	31,364	1,757,323	1998	
	1999	761,012	811,946	3,524	130,848	30,669	1,737,999	1999	
	2000	729,727	795,343	3,440	114,857	28,554	1,671,921	2000	
	2001	671,132	753,926	3,402	103,921	28,269	1,560,650	2001	
	2002	715,474	819,265	3,545	111,167	34,467	1,683,918	2002	
	2003	693,542	812,407	3,401	96,450	32,544	1,638,344	2003	
	2004	695,825	843,606	3,533	95,985	36,294	1,675,243	2004	
	2005	686,258	858,673	3,440	94,232	37,663	1,680,266	2005	
	2006	699,312	877,956	3,552	95,774	43,495	1,720,089	2006	
	2007	703,057	892,850	3,426	95,472	46,779	1,741,584	2007	
	2008	692,415	873,868	3,488	84,568	47,176	1,701,515	2008	
	2009	698,100	919,206	3,398	88,160	54,049	1,762,913	2009	
	2010	702,897	906,264	3,330	86,165	53,394	1,752,050	2010	
	2011	718,457	984,465	4,206	87,030	64,912	1,859,070	2011	
	2012	675,737	1,057,976	5,411	301,808	66,666	2,107,598	2012	
	2013	716,439	1,095,246	5,460	308,637	65,321	2,191,103	2013	
	2014	724,099	1,134,961	7,048	310,585	64,598	2,241,291	2014	
	2015	667,947	1,086,011	6,239	336,422	63,248	2,159,867	2015	
	2016	661,197	1,094,604	6,283	338,285	61,877	2,162,246	2016	
	2017	609,494	1,066,512	6,278	344,707	57,718	2,084,709	2017	
	2018	655,766	1,102,580	5,523	364,529	60,348	2,188,746	2018	
Notes:	Figures for each vehicle type are totals of all private, commercial and government vehicles								
	Figures for cars include taxis.								
	Figures for trucks include trucks of all sizes, including truck tractors.								
	Beginning 1994, FHWA moved passenger mini-vans and SUVs from Car column to Truck column								
	Other than the above note, wide swings in certain annual figures are not explained in FHWA records.								
	Trailers include house trailers (mobile/manufactured homes), semi-trailers and full trailers (all sizes).								
	As we go to print, 2018 is the latest year for which FHWA vehicle registration statistics are available.								

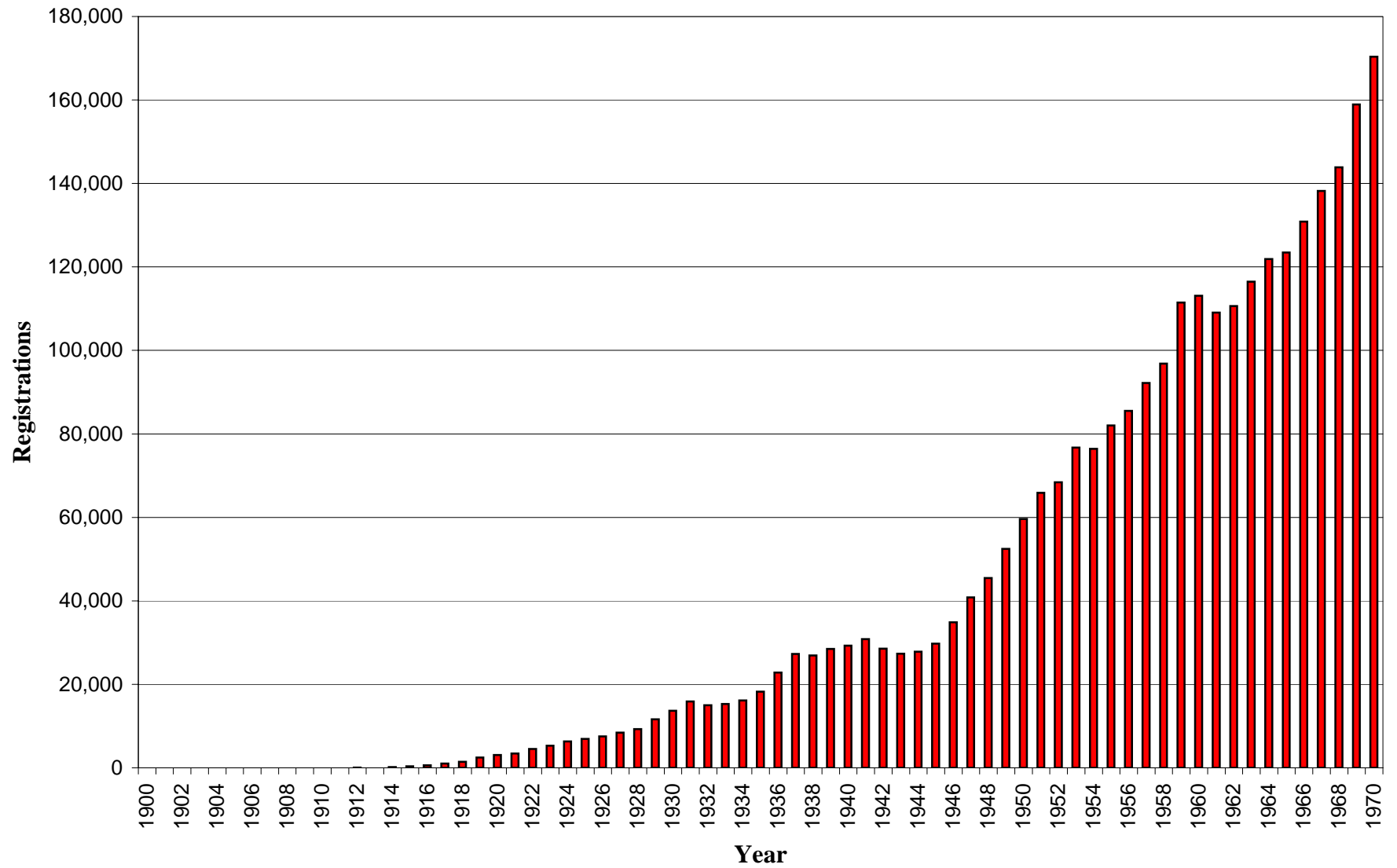
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## Automobiles



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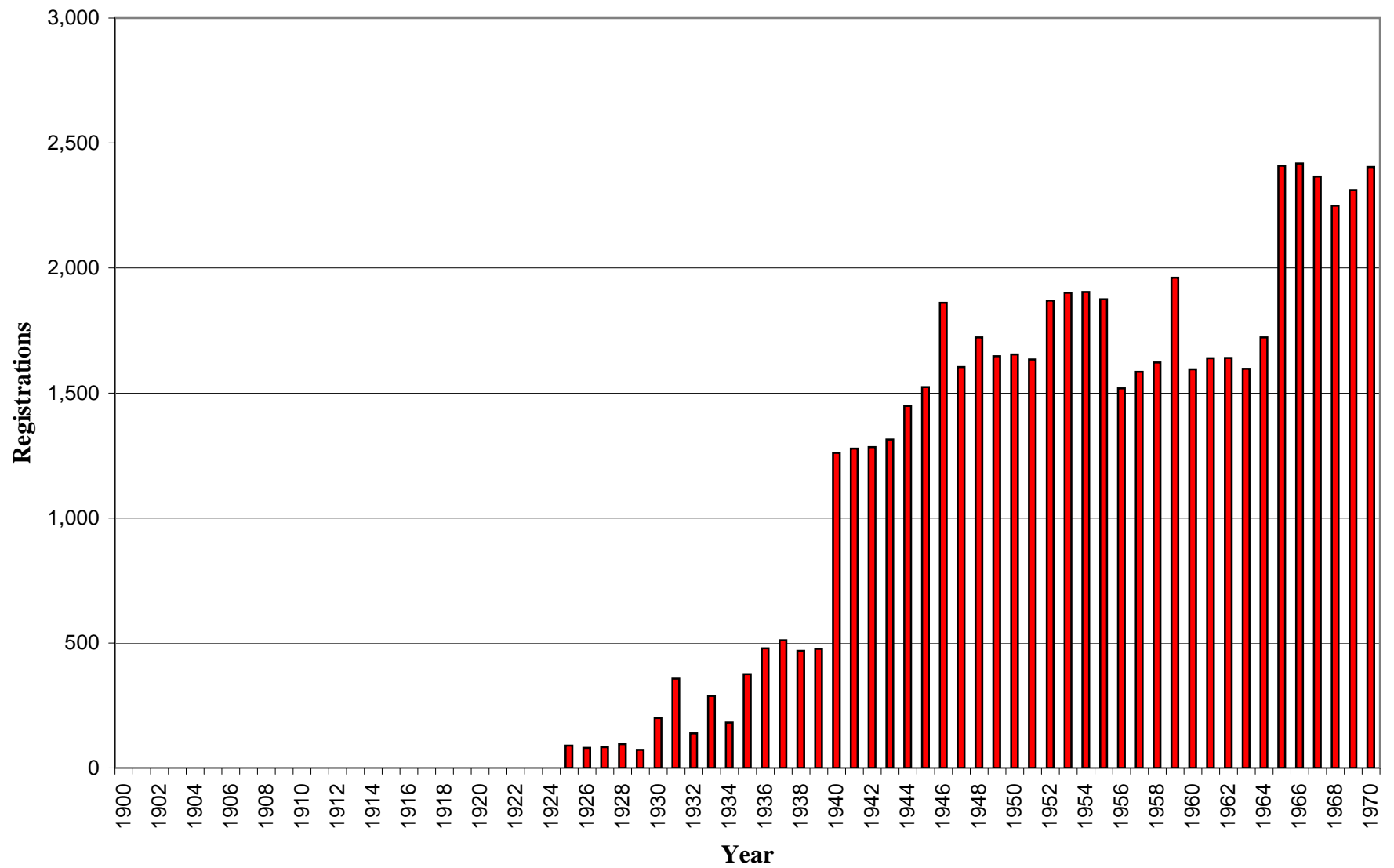
## Trucks



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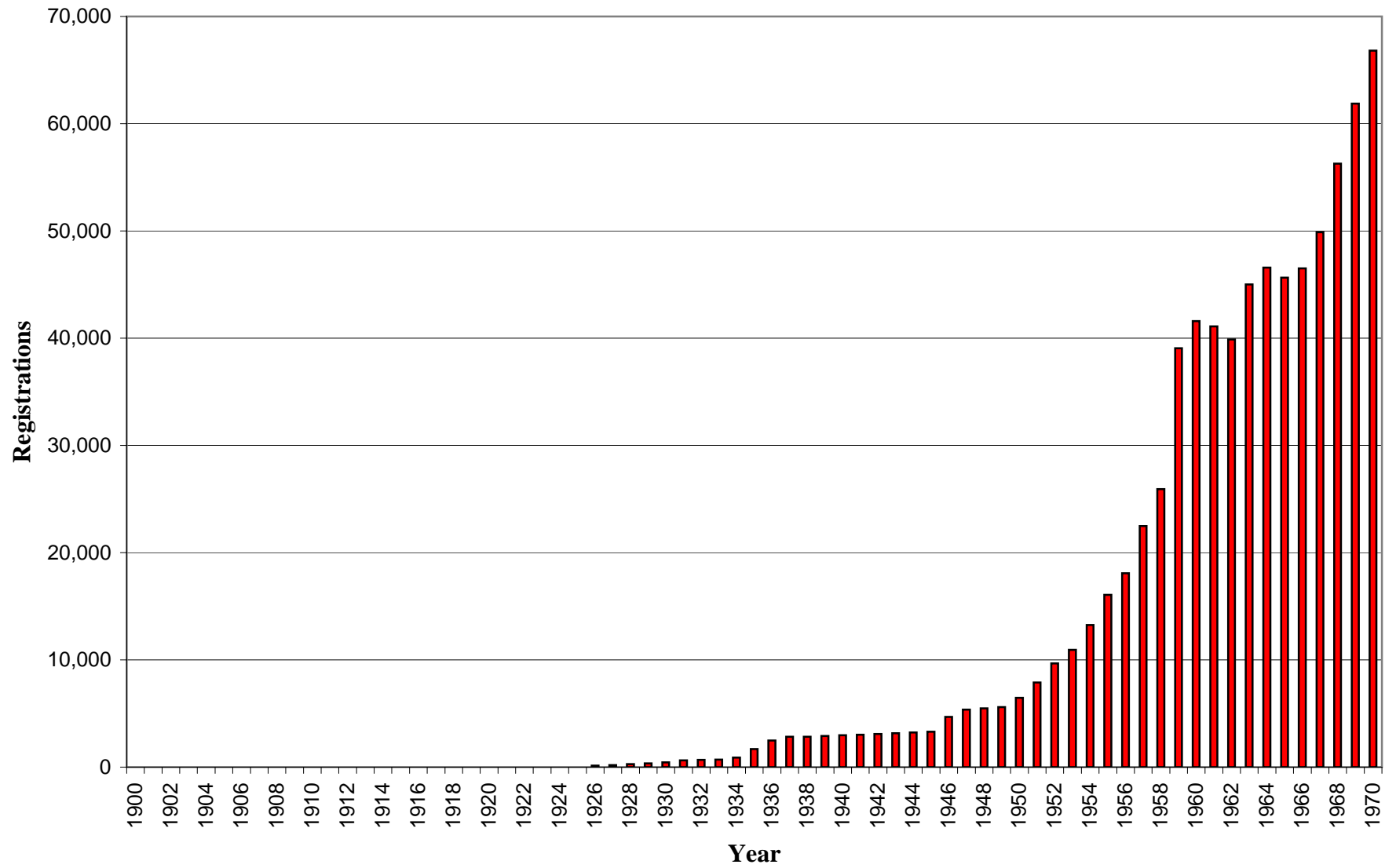


## Buses



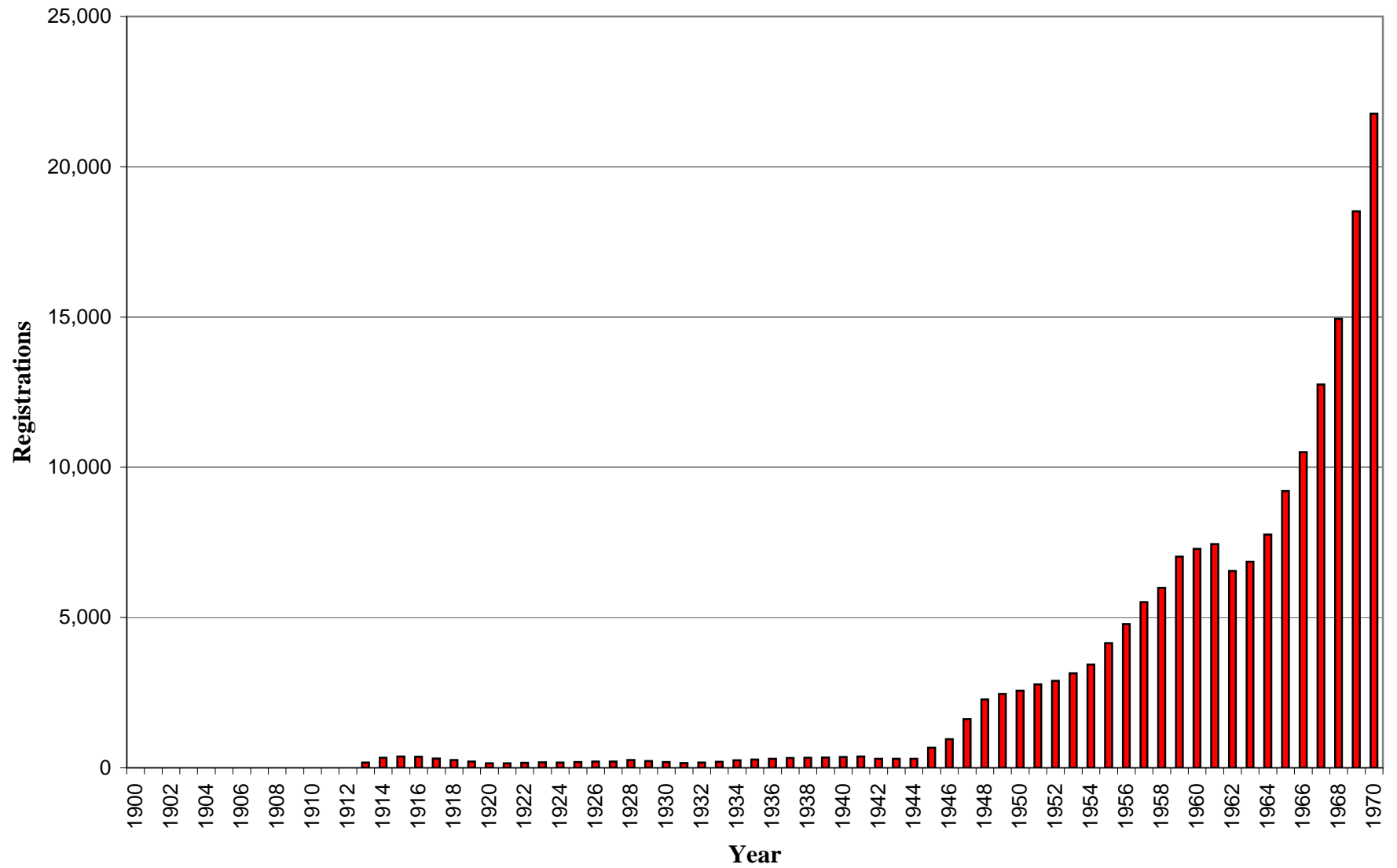
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## Trailers



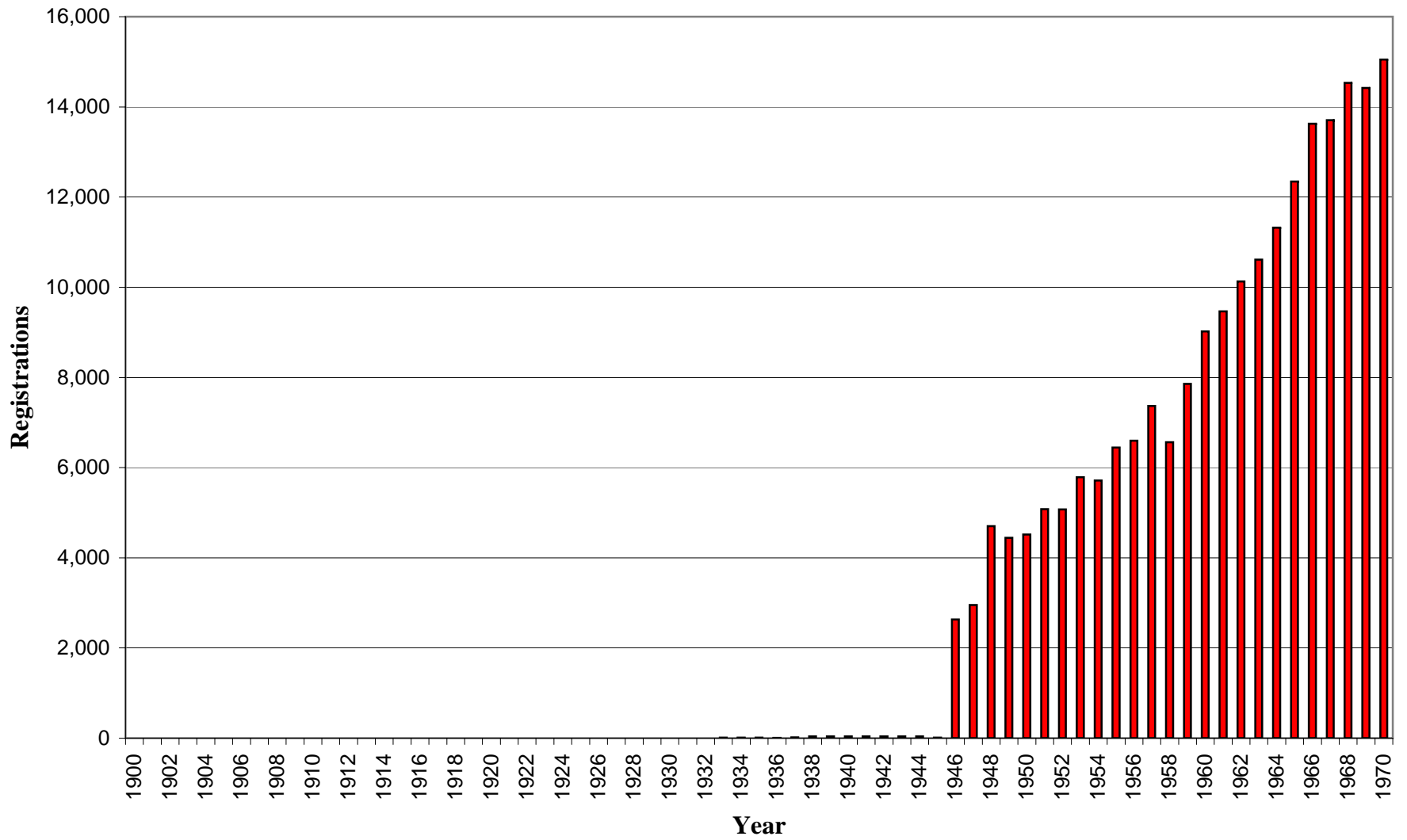
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## Motorcycles



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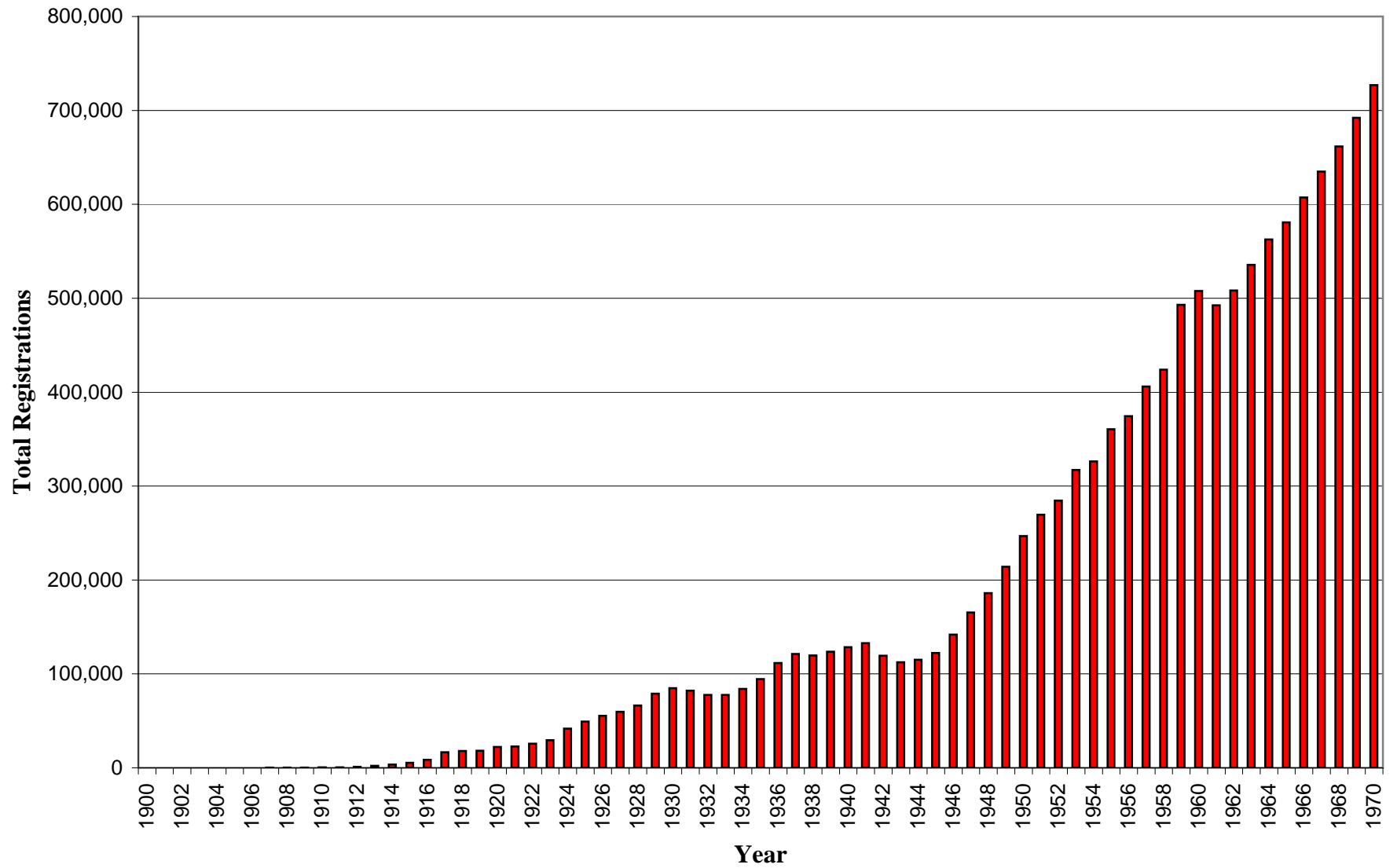
## All Government Vehicles



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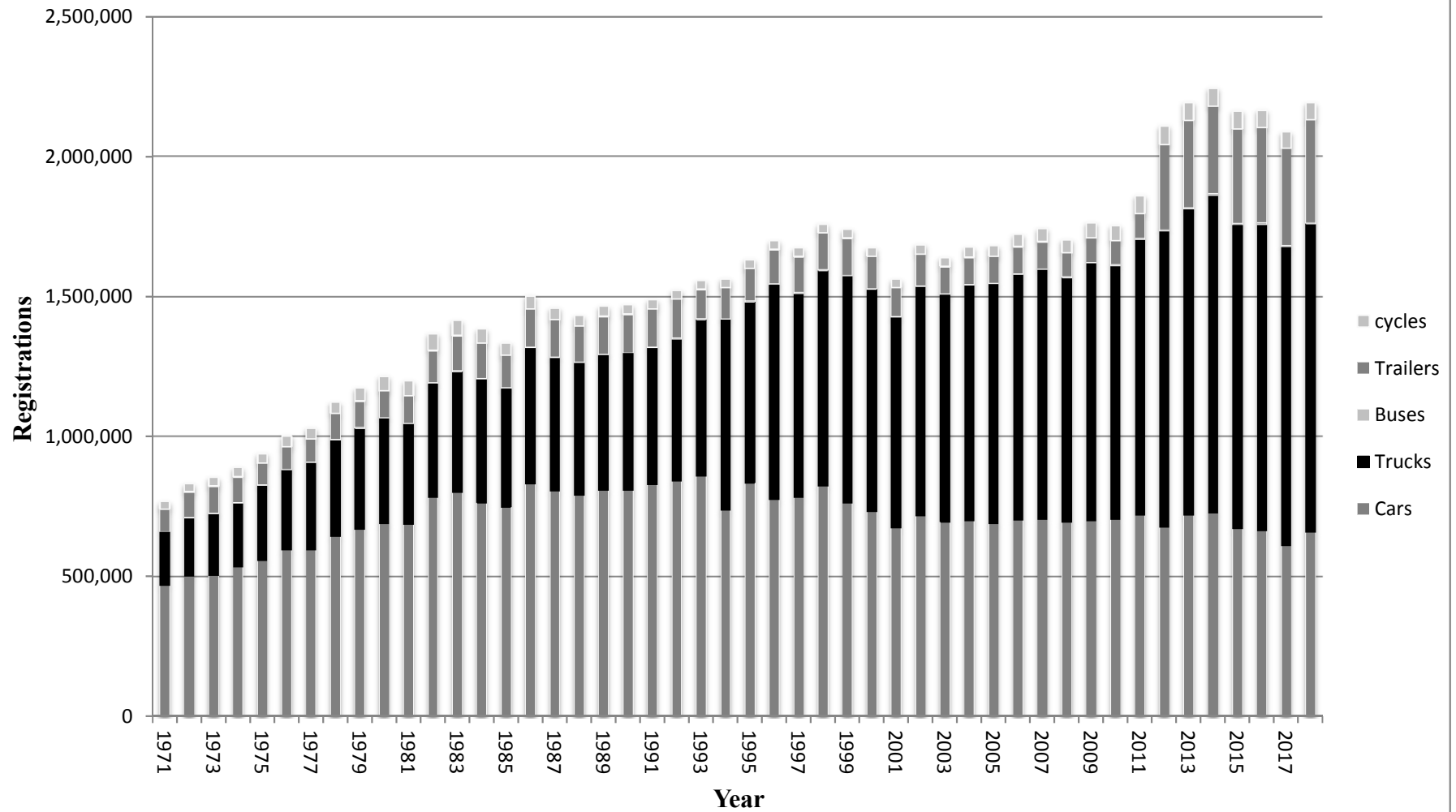


## All Motor Vehicles



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## New Mexico Motor Vehicle Registrations 1971-2018



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# New Mexico Towns

As an aid in the identification of locations where license plates have been registered to motor vehicles in New Mexico, this chapter lists the names of the vast majority of the towns which have existed at one time or another within the state. A great many of these, however, no longer survive—some having become ghost towns and others having vanished entirely.

A number of towns experienced changes in name or spelling over the years—several of them more than once—and these variations are included in the list. On occasion there have been two or more different towns which have used the same name, some even at the same time. In these instances the respective county names are shown in parentheses. Most of the towns listed here either have, or have had post offices, though in some cases for only a few months or years.

Those who wish to explore New Mexico's geography in greater depth will find the following publications a useful place to start:

*New Mexico Place Names*, T.M. Pearce, University of New Mexico Press, 1965,  
ISBN 0-8263-0082-0.

*New Mexico Road & Recreation Atlas*, Benchmark Maps, Medford, OR, 2010,  
ISBN 0-929591-11-9.

*Place Names of New Mexico, The*, Robert Julyan, University of New Mexico Press, 1998,  
ISBN 0-8263-1689-1.

*Post Offices of New Mexico*, Richard W. Helbock, Las Cruces, NM, 1981, (no ISBN).

The hard copy version of this book includes color images of vintage postage stamps with cancellations from many of the towns from the following list. When using the on-line version these same stamps and cancellations can be seen on the NMplates.com website at:

<https://NMplates.com/NewMexicoTowns.htm>

Abbott  
Abbott Station  
Abeytas  
Abiquiu  
Abo  
Acme  
Acoma  
Acomita

Adams Diggings  
Adberg  
Adelino  
Aden  
Adobe  
Afton  
Agricultural College  
Agua del Lobo

Agua Fria  
Agua Negra  
Agudo  
Ahmego  
Airoid  
Akela  
Alameda  
Alamillo

Alamo  
Alamogordo  
Alamogordo Army Air Field  
Alamogordo Junction  
Albatross  
Albemarle  
Albert  
Albuquerque

Albuquerque Army Air Base	Apache Creek	Becker	Brakes
Alcalde	Apache Springs	Beclabito	Bramlett
Alcatraz	Arabela	Beenham	Brasos
Alellen	Aragon	Belcher	Brazos
Aleman	Arch	Belen	Breece
Algodones	Archuleta (Bernalillo)	Bell	Brice
Alhambra	Archuleta (San Juan)	Bell Ranch	Brilliant
Alicia	Ard	Bellview	Brimhall
Alire	Arena	Bennett	Broadview
Alivio	Arenas Valley	Benson	Broncho
Allen	Armijo	Bent	Brown
Allerton	Arms	Berino	Brownhorn
Allie	Army Air Base Clovis	Bernal	Bryan
Allison (Grant)	Arragon	Bernalillo	Bryantine
Allison (McKinley)	Arrey	Bernardo	Buchanan
Alma	Arroyo del Agua	Bess	Buckeye
Alps	Arroyo Hondo	Bethel	Buckhorn
Altamont	Arroyo Seco	Beulah (Rio Arriba)	Buckman
Alto	Artesia	Beulah (San Miguel)	Buena Vista
Alumina	Arva	Bibo	Bueyeros
Alvarado	Atarque	Bickham	Buffalo
Amado	Atencio	Bingham	Bungalow
Amalia	Atoka	Black Hawk	Burley
Amargo	Augustine	Black Lake	Burns Canyon
Amboy	Aurora	Black River Village	Bursom
Ambrosia Lake	Ave Maria	Black Rock	Buxton
American Valley	Avis	Black Springs	Bynam
Amistad	Azotea	Blacktower	Byried
Amizett	Aztec	Blanco	Caballo
Añal	Azul	Blanco Trading Post	Caballo Dam
Analla	Azure	Bland	Cabezon
Anapra	Baca	Bloomfield	Cabezon Station
Ancho	Bacaville	Blossburg	Cabra
Ancones	Blackdom	Blue Water	Cabra Springs
Andrews	Baldy	Bluewater	Cambray
Angle	Ballejos	Bluit	Cambridge
Angostura	Banks	Blummer	Cameo
Angus	Barancos	Boaz	Cameron
Añil	Bard	Bodega	Camp
Animas	Bard City	Bogle	Camp Luna
Anniston	Barney	Bonanza	Camp Monarch
Annville	Barranca	Bond	Camp Reid (William C.)
Ansonio	Barton	Bonito	Campana
Antelope	Bayard	Borica	Canada
Antelope Wells	Bayard Station	Bosque	Canjilon
Anthony	Beauty	Box Lake	Cannon Air Force Base
Anton Chico	Beaver	Boyce	Canode
Apache	Beaverhead	Brackett	Canon

Canon Blanco	Central	Claunch	Cottonwood Grove
Canon Plaza	Central City	Clayton	Council Rock
Canoncito	Cerrillos	Clear Creek	Counselors
Canones	Cerritos	Cleveland	Cousins
Cantara	Cerro	Cliff	Cowan
Canton	Chaco Canyon	Clifford	Cowles
Canyon	Chacon	Clifton	Cowspring
Capitan	Chama	Clines Corners	Cox Canyon
Caprock	Chamberino	Closson	Coyote
Capulien	Chamisal	Cloudcroft	Coyote Canyon
Capulin (Rio Arriba)	Chamita	Cloverdale	Craig
Capulin (Union)	Chance City	Clovis	Cranes
Caracas	Chapelle	Clovis Air Force Base	Crater
Carbonateville	Chaperito	Clovis Army Air Field	Cribbenville
Carisbrook	Chapman	Clyde	Cribbenville
Carlisle	Chappel	Coalora	Crocker
Carlsbad	Charco	Coca	Cromer
Carlsbad Army Air Field	Charlotte	Cochiti	Crossroads
Carnahan	Chaves (Chaves)	Codorniz	Crowflat
Carne	Chaves (McKinley)	Cold Springs	Crownpoint
Carnero	Chaves (San Miguel)	Colfax	Crozier
Carolita	Cheechilgeetho	Collins Park	Crystal
Carpenter	Cherry Vale	Collinsville	Cuates
Carr (De Baca)	Cherryville	Colmor	Cuba
Carr (Valencia)	Chico	Colonias	Cubero
Carrizozo	Chico Springs	Colorado	Cuchillo
Carson	Chicoso	Columbus	Cuervo
Carter	Chijuilla	Conant	Cumberland
Carthage	Chilili	Conchas	Cumbres
Casa Blanca	Chimayo	Conchas Dam	Cundiyo
Casa Grande	Chiquita	Cone	Cunico
Casa Salazar	Chisum	Conrad	Curry
Casasalazar	Chloride	Continental	Cutter
Casaus	Chochiti Pueblo	Continental Divide	Cybar
Cass	Chupadere	Contreras	Dahlia
Castleberry	Church Rock	Cook's	Dale
Catalpa	Churchrock	Coolidge	Dalies
Catskill	Cienega	Cooney	Daly
Causey	Cieneguilla	Cooper	Danley
Cavarista	Cimarron	Copper	Danoffville
Cebolla	Cimilorio	Copperton	Datil
Cebolleta	Clairmont	Corazon	David
Cedar Crest	Clancy	Cordova	Dawson
Cedar Hill	Clapham	Corona	Dayton
Cedarvale	Clark	Corrales	De Vargas
Cedro	Clarkville	Correo	Dedman
Center Valley	Claud	Corrupa	Deer
Centerville	Claudell	Costilla	Deerpoint

Defiance	Earlham	Ensenada	Fort Cummings
Dehaven	Easley	Epris	Fort Fillmore
Delphos	East Camp	Escabosa	Fort Selden
Deming	East Las Vegas	Escondida	Fort Stanton
Deming Army Air Field	East Vaughn	Escondido	Fort Sumner
Dennison	Eastview	Esmeralda	Fort Sumner Army Air Field
Derenó	Eddy	Española	Fort Thorn
Derry	Edgewood	Espuela	Fort Union
Des Moines	Edith	Estancia	Fort Wingate
Deseo	Eichel	Estey	Fraleý
Desert	Eiland	Estrada	Frampton
Detroit	El Cerrito	Estrella	Franklin
Detroit Ranch	El Cuervo	Eunice	Frazier
Dewey	El Huerfano Trading Post	Evans	French
Dexter	El Morro	Exter	Fresnal
Diamonte	El Paso Gap	Fairacres	Frio
Diener	El Porvenir	Fairpoint	Frisco
Dilco	El Prado	Fairview	Frost
Dilia	El Pueblo	Farley	Fruitland
Dillon	El Rito	Farmington	Fullerton
Dismuke	El Vado	Faulkner	Fulton
Dixon	El Valle	Faywood	Gabaldon
Dodson	Elda	Faywood Station	Gage
Dolores (Santa Fe)	Elephant Butte	Felix	Galena
Dolores (Union)	Elida	Feliz	Galisteo
Domingo	Elizabethtown	Fence Lake	Gallegos
Dominguez	Elk	Fernandez de Taos	Gallina
Doña	Elkins (Chaves)	Ferndale	Gallinas
Doña Ana	Elkins (Colfax)	Ferry	Gallinas Spring
Dora	Elmendorf	Field (Curry)	Gallisteo
Doretta	Elmore	Field (Socorro)	Gallup
Doris	Elmwood	Fierro	Gamerco
Dorsey	Elva	Fleming	Garcia
Doso	Elvira	Flora Vista	Gardiner
Douglas	Elwood	Floravista	Garfield
Dripping Springs	Emberson	Florence	Garita
Drolets	Embudo	Florida (Luna)	Garrison
Dulce	Emery	Florida (Socorro)	Gascon
Dunken	Emery Gap	Floyd	Gato
Dunlap	Emzy	Fluorine	Gavaedon
Dunmoor	Encierre	Flying C Ranch	Gavalan
Duoro	Encinal	Flying H	Gavilan
Duran	Encino	Folsom	Genova
Durazno	Encinosa	Ford	Georgetown
Dwyer	Endee	Forrest	Geronimo
Eagle Hill	England	Fort Bascom	Gibson
Eagle Nest	Engle	Fort Bayard	Gila
Eaglehill	Enmedio	Fort Craig	Gila Hot Springs



Gila Hotsprings	Gusdorf	Hilario	Ima
Gise	Guy	Hill	Indiole
Givens	Haag	Hillsboro	Inez
Gladiola	Hachita	Hillsborough	Ingleville
Gladstone	Hadley	Hilton	Ingram
Glen	Hagan	Hilton Lodge	Iola
Glencoe	Hagerman	Hobart	Ione
Glenrio	Haile	Hobbs	Isidore
Glenwood	Hall's Peak	Hobbs Army Air Field	Isleta
Globe	Hamilton	Hockett	Ivanhoe
Glorieta	Hanley	Hodges	Jackson
Gold Hill	Hanover	Hogadero	Jal
Golden	Hanson	Holland	Jalaroso
Goldgrade	Hansonburg	Hollene	Jaquez
Goldgulch	Harence	Holloman	Jarales
Golondrinas	Harlan	Holloman Air Force Base	Jarales
Gonzales	Harrington	Holloway	Jaramillo
Gonzales Ranch	Harris	Hollywood	Jardin
Good Hope	Harroun	Holman	Jarilla
Gould	Hartford	Holy Cross	Jarilla Junction
Governador	Hassell	Hondale	Jemes
Grady	Hatch	Hondo	Jemez
Grafton	Hatch's Ranch	Hood	Jemez Pueblo
Graham	Hatod	Hope (Eddy)	Jemez Springs
Gran Quivira	Havener	Hope (Union)	Jenkins
Granada	Hayden	Hopewell	Jewett
Grande	Haynes (Rio Arriba)	Horace	Jicarilla
Grandview	Haynes (San Juan)	Horse Springs	Jicarillo
Grant	Heathden	Hospah	Johnson (San Miguel)
Grants	Heaton	Hot Springs (San Miguel)	Johnson (Union)
Grants Station	Hebron	Hot Springs (Sierra)	Jonesville
Grattan	Heck Canyon	House	Joneta
Gray	Helena	Hoxie	Jordan
Green Tree	Helweg	Hoxie Junction	Jornado
Greenfield	Hematite	Hudson (Grant)	Jose
Greens Gap	Henry	Hudson (Quay)	Joseph (Catron)
Greenville	Hereford	Hudson Hot Springs	Joseph (Rio Arriba)
Gregory	Hermanas	Hueco	Juan de Dios
Grenville	Hermosa	Humble City	Juan Tafoya
Griegos	Hernandez	Hummer	Juana Lopez
Grier	Herrera	Hunter	Juantafoya
Guadalupe	Herreraville	Hurlburt	Judson
Guadalupita	Herron	Hurley	Junction
Guagolotes	Hickman	Hyer	Junction City
Guam	High Rolls	Iden	June
Guillou	High Rolls - Mountain Park	Ildefonso	Kappus
Guique	Highrolls	Ilfeld	Kearney
Gurule	Highway	Illinois Camp	Kells

Kelly	Lake	Llano	Lucy
Kemp	Lake Arthur	Llaves	Lulu
Kenna	Lake Valley	Lloyd	Lumberton
Kennedy (Lincoln)	Lakevan	Lobato	Lumbre
Kennedy (Santa Fe)	Lakewood	Lobo	Luna
Kephart	Lama	Lockney	Luxor
Kermit	Lamdera	Loco Hills	Lybrook
Kettner	Lamy	Logan	Lyden
Kimball	Lanark	Logville	Lykins
King	Langton	Loma Parda	Lynn
Kingston	Largo	Lon	Macy
Kiowa	Las Colonias	Lone Pine	Madison
Kirk	Las Cruces	Longs	Madrid
Kirtland	Las Cruces Air Force	Longwell	Madrone
Kirtland Air Force Base	Station	Lookout	Maes
Kirtland Army Air Field	Las Nutrias	Looney	Magdalena
Knowles	Las Palomas	Lopezville	Magdalena Mines
Koehler	Las Tablas	Lordsburg	Malaga
Koogler	Las Trampas	Los Alamos (Los Alamos)	Maldonado
La Bajada	Las Vegas	Los Alamos (San Miguel)	Maljamar
La Boca	Las Vegas Hot Springs	Los Brazos	Malone
La Canada	Lascalonias	Los Cavos	Malpais
La Cienega	Lava	Los Cerrillos	Malpaiz
La Cinta	Lea	Los Chavez	Malpie
La Concepcion	Leach	Los Corralitos	Manchester
La Cuesta	Leasburg	Los Febres	Mangas
La Cueva	Leasburgh	Los Luceros	Mann
La Glorietta	Ledoux	Los Lunas	Manuelito
La Jara	Legansville	Los Montoyas	Manzana
La Joya	Leighton	Los Ojitos	Manzano
La Junta	Lemitar	Los Ojos	Marcia
La Lande	Leon	Los Pinos	Marguerita
La Liendre	Leoncito	Los Ranchos de	Mariana
La Loma	Leopold	Albuquerque	Mariano Lake
La Luz	Lesbia	Los Tanos	Marion
La Madera	Lesperance	Los Vigiles	Marquez
La Mesa	Levy	Louis	Martinez (Bernalillo)
La Plata	Lewis	Lourdes	Martinez (Colfax)
La Puente	Lewiston	Loving	Massey
La Union	Leyba	Lovington	Mastodon
La Ventana	Liberty (Quay)	Lower Nutria	Maxwell
Labelle	Liberty (San Juan)	Lower Penasco	Maxwell City
Lacy	Lincoln	Lower San Francisco Plaza	Mayhill
Ladd	Linda Vista	Loyd	McAlister
Laguna	Lindrith	Lucas	McCarty
Lagunita	Lingo	Lucero	McCarty's
Lagunitas	Lisbon	Lucia	McCartys
Lajoya	Liston	Lucille	McDonald

McGaffey	Mogollon	Niota	Osha
McGregor	Monero	Nobe	Otero (Colfax)
McIntosh	Monica	Nogal	Otero (Valencia)
McLean	Monista	Nolan	Otis
McMillan	Monte Aplanado	Noria	Otowi
Medanales	Monterey	North	Otten
Medio	Montezuma (Bernalillo)	North Des Moines	Otto
Medler	Montezuma (San Miguel)	North Lucy	Ozanne
Meek	Montezuma (Socorro)	Norton	Padillas
Meloche	Monticello	Nutrias	Page
Melrose	Montoya	Nutt	Paguete
Melvin	Monument	Oakwood Springs	Painter
Mentmore	Moorad	Oasis	Pajarito
Mesa	Moore	Obar	Palma
Mesa Rica	Mora	Ocate	Palmer Ranch
Mescalero	Moriarty	Ochoa	Palmilla
Mesilla	Moses	Odon	Palms
Mesilla Park	Mosquero	Ogle	Palomas Springs
Mesquite	Mount Vernon	Ohaysi	Paquate
Metcalf	Mountain Park	Oil Center	Paradise Plains
Mexican Springs	Mountainair	Oil City	Paraje
Miami	Mountainview	Ojito	Park
Micho	Mt. Dora	Ojo Caliente	Park Springs
Midnight	Mt. Riley	Ojo de la Vaca	Park View
Midway	Mule Creek	Ojo del Padre	Parks
Miera (Bernalillo)	Murdock	Ojo Feliz	Parsons
Miera (Union)	Murray	Ojo Sarco	Parton
Miesse	Myndus	Old Albuquerque	Pasamonte
Milagro	Nadine	Old San Jose	Paschal
Milagros	Nageezi	Olio	Pastura
Milan	Nakaibito Springs	Olive	Patterson (Catron)
Miller	Nambe	Olquin	Patterson (Union)
Milligan	Nara Visa	Omega	Paxton Springs
Mills	Naranjos	Omero	Pearl
Milnesand	Naschitti	Onava	Pearson
Mimbres	Nava	Opal	Pecos
Mimbres Hot Springs	Navajo	Optimo	Pedernal
Minco	Navajo Dam	Oran	Pena Blanca
Mineosa	Need	Orchard Park	Pena Flor
Mineral City	Negra	Organ	Penablanca
Mineral Hill	New Albuquerque	Oriental	Penasco
Mineral Springs	New Hobbs	Orogrande	Pendaries
Minero	New Laguna	Ortiz	Pendelton
Mirage	Newcomb	Orton (Luna)	Penistaja
Mirian	Newhope	Orton (Quay)	Pennington
Mishawaka	Newkirk	Osceola	Pep
Mitchell	Newman	Oscura	Peralta
Modoc	Newton	Oscuro	Percha

Perdenal	Ponderosa	Rana	Rinconada
Perea (McKinley)	Ponil	Ranchdale	Ring
Perea (Sandoval)	Ponil Park	Ranches of Taos	Rio Chama
Perico	Pope	Ranchitos	Rio Colorado
Perry	Portair	Rancho	Rio en Medio
Perryville	Portales	Ranchos de Taos	Rio Lucio
Petaca	Porter (San Juan)	Ranchvale	Rio Mimbres
Phillipsburg	Porter (Sandoval)	Ranger Lake	Rio Pueblo
Picacho	Porvenir	Raton	Rio Puerco
Pie Town	Potrillo	Rattlesnake	Rio Rancho
Pilar	Prairie View	Raventon	Ritchey
Pina	Prairieview	Rayado	Riverside
Pine	Pratt	Rayo	Road Forks
Pine Forest	Preston	Real de Dolores	Roanoak
Pine Lodge	Prewitt	Red Bluff	Roberts
Pine Spring	Pritchard	Red Canon	Robinson
Pinedale	Progreso	Red Canyon	Robsart
Pinehaven	Progreso	Red Cloud (Lincoln)	Rociada
Pines	Pueblito	Red Cloud (Torrance)	Rock Island
Pinespring	Pueblitos	Red Hill	Rodarte
Pinkerton	Pueblo	Red Hill	Rodeo
Pinon	Pueblo Bonito	Red Mountain	Rodey
Pinos Altos	Puertecito	Red River	Rogers
Pinos Wells	Puerto	Red River Springs	Romero (San Miguel)
Pinoswells	Puerto de Luna	Red Rock	Romero (Santa Fe)
Pinoville	Pulaski	Redlake	Romeroville
Pintada	Punneo	Redland	Romiaah
Pinto	Punta	Redrock	Roosevelt
Pioneer	Punta de Agua	Reed's Ranch	Rosa
Pita	Putnam	Regina	Rosebud
Pittsburg	Putney	Rehoboth	Rosedale
Placita	Pyra	Rencona	Rosing
Placitas	Pyramid	Reserve	Roswell
Plain	Quarai	Revuelto	Roswell Army Air Field
Plainview	Quay	Reyes	Round House
Plateau	Queen	Ribera	Round Mountain
Platero	Quemado	Ricardo	Rountree
Playas	Questa	Rice	Rowe
Plaza	Quincey	Richardson	Roy
Plaza del Alcalde	Quito	Richland	Rubin
Pleano	Rabenton	Richmond	Rudolph
Pleasant	Radium Springs	Ricolite	Rudolph
Pleasant Hill	Rael	Riddle	Ruia
Pleasanton	Ragland	Riley (Curry)	Ruidoso
Plomo	Rainsville	Riley (Socorro)	Ruidoso Downs
Pojoaque	Ralston	Rincon (Doña Ana)	Rumaldo
Polvadera	Ramah	Rincon (San Miguel)	Russia
Polvadero	Ramon	Rincon Montoso	Ruth

Rutheron	Sanchez	Sile	Summit
Rutter	Sandia	Silio	Sunland Park
Ryado	Sandia Base	Silton	Sunnyside
Sabinal	Sandia Park	Silver City	Sunset
Sabinoso	Sandoval	Skarda	Sunshine Valley
Sacramento	Sands	Slagle	Sunspot
Saint Patrick	Santa Clara	Smith (Eddy)	Suwanee
Saint Vrain	Santa Cruz	Smith (Union)	Swamp
Salado	Santa Fe	Smiths Lake	Swarts
Salem	Santa Rita	Socorro	Swartz
Salinas	Santa Rosa	Socorro Mines	Swastika
Salt Lake	Santa Teresa	Sofia	Sweazeaville
Sampson	Santander	Soham	Sweet Water
San Acacia	Santo Domingo Pueblo	Solano	Sylvanite
San Antonio (Socorro)	Santo Thomas	Sombrio	Tabler
San Antonio (Taos)	Sapello	South Fork	Tafoya
San Antonio Springs	Satekon	South Spring	Taft
San Antonito	Sauz	Southside	Taiban
San Augustine	Savoia	Southspring	Tajique
San Carlos	Savoya	Spalding	Tajon
San Cristobal	Sawyer	Spindle	Talpa
San Fidel	Saydato	Spring Hill	Tandy
San Filipe	Schausten	Springer	Taos
San Francisco	Scholle	Spur Lake	Taos Junction
San Francisco Plaza	Schroeder	St. Vrain	Tapia
San Geronimo	Scott	Stanbro	Tapicitos
San Hilario	Seama	Standing Rock	Tate
San Ignacio (Guadalupe)	Sebolla	Stanley	Tatum
San Ignacio (San Miguel)	Seboyeta	Star (Guadalupe)	Taylor
San Ildefonso	Sedan	Star (Socorro)	Taylor Springs
San Isidro	Sedillo	State College	Tecolote
San Jon	Selden	Staubro	Tecoloteños
San Jose (San Miguel)	Sena	Staunton	Tecolotito
San Jose (Socorro)	Seneca	Stead	Teel
San Juan	Senorito	Steeplerock	Telesfora
San Juan Pueblo	Separ	Stegman	Telles
San Lorenzo	Serafina	Stein's Pass	Temporal
San Luis	Servilleta	Steins	Tequesquite
San Marcial	Seven Rivers	Stelworth	Terrero
San Mateo	Shakespeare	Stockton	Tesuque
San Miguel (Doña Ana)	Shamrock	Stockton's	Texico
San Miguel (San Miguel)	Shandon	Stonehaven	The Pines
San Pablo	Sheep Springs	Stong	Therma
San Patricio	Sherman	Strauss	Therman
San Pedro	Shiprock	Sugarite	Thomas
San Rafael	Shoemaker	Sulphur	Thompson
San Simon	Sia	Sulphur Springs	Thoreau
San Ysidro	Sibley	Sumac	Thorne

Thornham	Tuloso	Veitch	White Oaks
Thornton	Tunis	Velarde	White Rock
Three Rivers	Turley	Ventanes	White Sands Proving
Threerivers	Turn	Venus	Ground
Tierra Amarilla	Turner	Vera Cruz	White Signal
Tierra Blanca	Turnerville	Vermejo	White Sulphur Springs
Tijeras	Turquesa	Vermejo Park	White Tail
Tilden	Turquillo	Vernon	White's City
Tinaja	Turquoise	Vevay	Whites City
Tingle	Tusas	Victor	Whitetail
Tinnie	Twining	Victoria	Whitewater
Tipton	Two Grey Hills	Victorio	Whitfield
Tiptonville	Tyrone	Vigil (Harding)	Whitney
Toadlena	University Park	Vigil (Quay)	Whitson
Toboggan	Upham	Villanueva	Willard
Tocito	Upper Mimbres	Virden	Williams
Tohatchi	Upper Mora	Virginia	Williamsburg
Tokay	Upper Nutria	Virsylvia	Willis
Tolar	Upper Penasco	Vista	Willow
Toltec	Upton	Vocant	Willow Springs
Tome	Ute Creek	Volcano	Wilna
Tony	Ute Park	Wagner	Winkle
Toril	Vadito	Wagon Mound	Winston
Torrance	Vado	Waldo	Wolf Canon
Torreón	Valdez	Walker Air Force Base	Woodbury
Totavi	Valedon	Wallace (San Juan)	Woodrow
Towanda	Valencia	Wallace (Sandoval)	Wooten
Towner	Vallecitos	Walnut Wells	Wright
Trachado	Valley (Chaves)	Wanette	Xray
Tracy	Valley (Union)	Warren	Yankee
Trailsend	Valley Ranch	Water Canon	Yates
Trampas	Valley View	Water Canyon	Yeso
Tramperas	Valmont	Watercanon	Yesso
Travesilla	Valmora	Waterflow	Youngsville
Trechado	Valverde	Waterloo	Yrisarri
Trementina	Van Houton	Watrous	Zamora
Trenton	Vanadium	Weber	Zora
Tres Lagunas	Vance	Weed	Zuni
Tres Piedras	Vander Wagen	West	
Tres Ritos	Vanderitas	West El Paso	
Trinchara	Vaqueros	West Tularosa	
Troyburgh	Variadero	Westmore	
Truchas	Varney	Westwater	
Trujillo	Vaud	Wheatland	
Truth or Consequences	Vaughn	White Flat	
Tsaya	Vaur	White Horse	
Tucumcari	Veda	White Lakes	
Tularosa	Veguita	White Mountain	

# Miscellany

The following pages describe and illustrate New Mexico license plates and related items which do not readily fall within the categories covered by the preceding chapters. Aside from varieties or variations of regularly issued tags, plates issued by entities other than the New Mexico state government are also pictured here. Additionally, there are a number of items which in various ways are either associated with license plates, or are not license plates at all but which are often misidentified as such.

We have not, however, attempted to include every unusual item that one might come across. Rather, we have elected to illustrate a cross section of some commonly seen plate variations, along with some less frequently encountered articles whose origin and use are likely to raise questions among those with an interest in New Mexico license plates.

**Photographs:** In the hard copy version of the *Early New Mexico License Plates* book the photographs for this chapter will be found immediately following the last page of the chapter's text. When using the on-line version the photographs can be seen by clicking the link(s) given at the end of each sub-section.

## Variations of New Mexico License Plates and Error Plates

In Chapter 2 it was mentioned that when it comes to stamping, die and other variations of New Mexico plates, the possibilities are seemingly endless. A few of the most distinctive varieties are described below, with illustrations appearing later in this chapter and on the NMplates.com website.

**1918 Passenger.** Two quite obviously different types exist for this year, commonly referred to as the "thin" and "thick" varieties.

The first of these were stamped on sheet steel blanks that were little more than half as thick as the state's other plates, either before or after. The embossing on these plates is quite shallow, such that the numerals and letters have little relief. Colors are medium blue on battleship grey, which provides little contrast and renders the plates virtually unreadable at other than close range. The thin variety began at plate #1 and is known for plates up to approximately #14000.

The thick variety is pretty much conventional in both materials and embossing, with the colors being very dark navy blue on olive grey. On the few known unissued specimens, the navy blue is so dark as to appear black without close inspection. (The majority of these thick plates are seen as repainted specimens, and are invariably painted incorrectly, with the numerals and letters in a light blue that is in fact far too light even for the earlier thin plates.) The serial numbers of this variety pick up where the former leave off, and are believed to run from approximately 14001 to 19000.

**1925 Passenger.** More than one state, at one time or another, embossed its plates “FRONT” and “REAR” to prevent the pair from being split up and used on two different cars. New Mexico did this in only one year, 1925. It is perhaps stretching the definition of “variety,” but one could successfully argue that the front and rear tags constitute two different varieties of 1925 plates.

**1951 Motorcycle.** There are several instances where both steel and aluminum plates of various types appeared in a given year, but unless one physically handles the plates, the material they’re made of is not readily apparent. On the other hand, after most of the 1951 motorcycle plates had been made of steel, a small number were manufactured toward the end of the year with leftover 1949 waffle aluminum blanks which are strikingly different in appearance from the plain ones. (There are reports of a few early-’50s car plates having been made from waffle aluminum blanks as well.) This substitution appears to have been the result of steel shortages precipitated by the Korean War.

**1952 & 1953 Truck.** From their inception in 1930, New Mexico’s truck plates were distinguished by the word “TRUCK” embossed vertically at the far right side. And beginning in 1933, truck plate colors for most years were the reverse of those for passenger cars, adding to their distinctiveness.

Late in 1952, after wider dies had already been introduced earlier in the year, Bernalillo County reached 10,000 truck registrations for the first time. The two factors combined left no room for the “TRUCK” legend and it was eliminated on the last few dozen Bernalillo truck plates (serial 2-10000 and higher). This variety is exceptionally rare. At some point during the 1953 production run a decision was made to eliminate the embossed word “TRUCK” from all plates and retain only the reversed colors to distinguish trucks tags from those for cars, resulting in two different styles of truck plates for this year as well. Both 1953 types are relatively easy to find.

**1961 Passenger and others.** Popular belief has held that New Mexico issued two styles of undated base plates in 1961, i.e., reflective white and painted white, and did so through 1964. In fact, the reflective bases were issued in 1961 and 1962 (and were renewable through 1964), then were entirely discontinued and replaced by painted base plates beginning in late 1962. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 5, 1962, p.2, c.1] (The painted bases were also renewable through 1964). Consequently, though there are two different varieties of base plates for this period, they are actually from different years, and only in 1963 and 1964 were both on the road at the same time. (A few trailer plates issued very late in 1962 are known to be on painted bases; there may be other very late 1962 types on painted bases as well.)

**1966 Motorcycle.** A major milestone was reached in 1966 which resulted in two very different varieties of cycle plates for this year. As detailed in the “Motorcycle” chapter, motorcycle tags had been reduced in size to a diminutive 3¾" x 6" beginning in 1959. These smaller plates could accommodate only the “M” prefix plus a maximum of four numerical digits, with the highest possible number therefore being M9999.



All was well until the latter part of 1966, when motorcycle registrations exceeded 10,000 for the first time, necessitating another digit. Consequently, the plate size was increased, this time to 4" x 7", a size which has subsequently remained unchanged to this day. The result was that two different sizes of motorcycle plates were manufactured for 1966, with most of them being the smaller size, and relatively few being the larger. Actual-size photos of both sizes of the 1966 plates will be seen in the “Motorcycle” chapter.

**1974 Passenger.** During the 1974 registration year the prison ran out of metal blanks, whereupon the state quickly printed up thousands of full-size red-on-white paper plates. These were used until a new supply of metal was obtained a few months later, at which time the paper plates were replaced with metal plates bearing the same number that had appeared on the paper tags.

**Error Plates.** Tags with manufacturing errors are often considered to be additional varieties of plates. These range from something as simple as a plate being stamped off center, to more serious errors, such as the wrong dies being used. Examples of both extremes are illustrated in the photo pages at the end of this chapter and on the NMplates.com website.

Website Photos for Varieties: <https://NMplates.com/Varieties.htm>

Website Photos for Error Plates: <https://NMplates.com/Error.htm>

## Double Zia Plates

Double Zia plates (or just “double Zias,” for short) are those on which the Indian sun symbol (the “Zia”) appears twice—once on each side of the serial number. This arrangement fills out what would otherwise be a lot of blank real estate on low-numbered plates, i.e., tags with three or fewer digits, thereby greatly improving the plates’ appearance. (A similar technique was used in the teens when single-digit serial numbers were flanked by a pair of dashes.)

Though the Zia symbol—with the two-digit year embossed within the Zia’s circle—debuted on New Mexico license plates in 1927, all plates for that year had a single Zia. The double Zia design was introduced a year later, in 1928, albeit only on Governor plates. In subsequent years the configuration began to appear on additional types, some examples of which are: Official and Staff Officer, 1929; Highway Department, 1931; Passenger and Trailer, 1932; Samples, 1934; Lt. Governor, probably 1931, but in any case no later than 1936; State Police Passenger Car, 1938; Secretary of State and Speaker of the House, 1946 (earliest known of these two types). Double Zias of the various types are illustrated within the respective chapters of this book and on NMplates.com.

Double Zias are known to have appeared on a few other types—notably Truck and C-prefix Commercial—but in these cases not all low-numbered plates for a given year were manufactured as double Zias. This circumstance may indicate that these were error plates, a hypothesis supported by the fact that on double Zia Commercial plates the only place available to mount the weight/capacity seal (tab) was on top of the right-hand Zia, thereby obscuring most of the symbol.

Regularly issued double Zia plates were brought to an end in 1947 with the advent of the county prefix numbering system, wherein a single Zia was used to separate the county number from the plate's serial number. The use of a second Zia, even on low-numbered tags, would have had no aesthetic benefit on these newly-designed plates.

When vanity (personalized) plates were introduced in 1967 (1979 for motorcycles) the Zia symbol was made available as one of several symbols which could be incorporated into the personalized serial "number." Consequently, it was theoretically possible to have not only a double Zia, but to have as many as six Zias on a car (or truck) vanity, and up to five Zias on a motorcycle vanity. Vanities, however, are not regularly issued license plates, and therefore fall outside the generally accepted definition of double Zia plates. In any case, since about 2018 the MVD has no longer permitted the use of any special characters on Vanity plates, such that they can now be found only on older vanities.

Website Photos for Double Zias: <https://NMplates.com/DoubleZias.htm>

## **Duplicate Plates**

From time to time license plates will become lost, damaged or stolen, thereby obliging vehicle owners to obtain replacements. This eventuality was foreseen in the opening paragraph of New Mexico's first automobile licensing law which provided that "[a] duplicate ... plate may be issued by the Secretary of State to the person to whom the original was issued, upon payment of a fee of one dollar." [1912 *Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 28, Section 1.] And in New Mexico's early motor vehicle registration books one will find the occasional notation that a particular plate was issued as a "duplicate," although such occurrences were not common.

There was nothing special about these duplicate plates. The recipient received a regular license plate bearing whatever sequential number happened to come up on the date the request for the duplicate was received. In other words, these plates looked like all others for that year of issue.

For a long time the issuance of duplicate plates created a complication for law enforcement officials because copies of registration records, at best, were typically not circulated to them until mid-year. The records were then updated only infrequently, if at all. The result was that the information available was never current and never complete. More often than not there was no way to tell that a given plate number had been canceled, or that a particular plate had been issued as a duplicate which superseded some earlier plate.

Though there may have been predecessors which have not yet been discovered, the earliest known plate which was uniquely identified as having been issued as a duplicate is a 1966 passenger plate whose sticker bears the word "DUPLICATE." Similarly identified stickered plates for both cars and motorcycles are known for several additional years in the late '60s and early '70s, and they almost certainly exist for trucks and other types of vehicles as well.

There are only two known New Mexico plates which have the word “DUPLICATE” embossed in the plate itself and those are 1970 and 1971 Dealer plates. But the fact that the prison plate shop had the dies to emboss the word hints at the possibility that there may be others yet to be found.

Not long after this time period computer and data transmission technology had advanced to the point where law enforcement personnel gained instantaneous access to all registration records. A simple query to the Motor Vehicle Division computer would immediately reveal the status and ownership of any plate. That being the case, there was no longer anything to be gained by branding a license plate as a “Duplicate” and the practice appears to have ended in the early 1970s. When a duplicate is needed now, the motorist can elect to have a duplicate made with the same serial number as is being replaced, or receive a plate from the current numerical sequence, just as was the case in 1912, albeit at a price of \$17.00 rather than \$1.00.

Website photos for Duplicate Plates: <https://NMplates.com/Duplicate.htm>

## Temporary Plates

One could argue that New Mexico’s 1932 Guest plates were a form of “temporary” plate, and indeed, for out-of-state salesmen they were effectively used for just that purpose. But in this section we consider only those plates provided by dealers to buyers of motor vehicles at the time of purchase. This type of plate is printed on paper or card stock and is valid for only a short period—just long enough to give the buyer time to register the vehicle with the Motor Vehicle Division and get a permanent plate.

It is unknown when the first temporary plates of this type were used, and though the earliest example in our archives is from 1964, they surely were in use long before that year. The fact that the 1964 plate was valid for only nine days may be a reflection of a time when the lines in Motor Vehicle Division offices were not so long as they are today, and motorists were not as inclined to postpone the disagreeable and onerous task of registering a vehicle.

The 1964 temporary plate has only a small space in which to write the expiration date, with instructions to write the date in figures “not less than ½ inch in height.” The truth of the matter is that there was hardly room to do even that, such that the expiration was not discernable from more than a couple of feet away.

By the 1980s if not earlier, temporary tags were being given a life of thirty days and most of the space on the plate was given over to a pre-printed grid of squares where the expiration date would be shown. The dealer used a large felt-tip pen to blacken appropriate grid squares to form block numeric characters which indicated the last date the plate could legally be used. The appearance of the characters was suggestive of what might be produced by a giant dot matrix printer.

All designs of temporary plates used by New Mexico up into the 1990s could easily be counterfeited, a task made ridiculously simple by the proliferation of copy machines beginning in the 1970s. On the surface it seems that there is little to be gained by making fake temporary plates, but the practice must have evolved into a serious problem, for the state ultimately took measures to foil the schemers. Since about 2005 New Mexico's temporary plates have contained an embedded hologram strip, effectively putting an end to realistic counterfeits.

Temporary plates have always had a high mortality rate. In some years they were required to be taped to the inside of the rear window, which virtually guaranteed they would be ripped apart when removed. In other years the rule was that they be attached to the rear bumper, where they dissolved the first time it rained. Though millions have been issued, comparatively few survive.

Website Photos for Temporary Plates: <https://NMplates.com/Temporary.htm>

## **Canceled Plates**

Until 1979 New Mexico was a plate-to-car state, meaning that when a car was sold, the license plate went with the car. The early motor vehicle laws took this into account and provided a mechanism whereby the registration and plate could be transferred to the new owner for a nominal fee. For a long time, though, nothing was said about what to do in the event that a plate was no longer needed—when a car was junked, for example.

By the 1930s procedures were put in place for such a plate to be returned for cancellation. Presumably, these plates were ultimately discarded, but surviving examples from the early '30s show that at least some of them were first rubber stamped with the word "CANCELLED" (the double "L" is a correct alternate spelling.) A canceled 1931 truck plate stamped in this manner is illustrated later in this chapter and on the NMplates.com website.

Website Photos for Canceled Plates:  
<https://NMplates.com/Miscellany.htm#CancelledPlate>

## **Plates from U.S. Military Bases in New Mexico**

For several decades military installations throughout the U.S. issued their own license plates, usually made of metal and often designed as "toppers" to be attached to existing state-issued plates. Primarily serving as "gate passes" to identify civilian vehicles authorized to enter the base, they first appeared in great numbers during World War II. It was during this period that hundreds of new bases were built from scratch to house and train some fourteen million service members who served during the conflict, along with a similar number of civilians working in construction and support capacities.

Though there are many exceptions, certain color schemes were sometimes adopted for military plates to indicate whether the registrant was an officer, enlisted soldier, or civilian. Typically, a plate whose predominate color was blue

indicated an officer, red indicated enlisted, green or black indicated civilian. However, so few plates are known to have survived from New Mexico installations that it is difficult to know to what extent their colors followed this pattern. (In some cases the plate serial number itself was prefixed by an uppercase letter "O" for officers, or an uppercase "E" for enlisted soldiers.)

The majority of plates of this type were issued during the 1940s and 1950s, but were generally undated. Most were superseded by self-adhesive bumper stickers in the 1960s, which in turn were replaced by windshield stickers in the 1970s.

Below is a summary of military bases which existed in New Mexico during and following World War II. Those installations for which license plates are known to have been issued are underlined. Plates from the other bases remain to be discovered. The information given here will be found useful in establishing approximate dates for tags that are not otherwise dated.

**Albuquerque Army Air Base**, Albuquerque. Established 1941 and also called Albuquerque Army Air Field. Renamed Kirtland Army Air Field 1942. Became Kirtland Air Force Base (see below) 1947.

**Alamogordo Army Air Field**, Alamogordo. Established 1942, renamed Holloman Air Force Base (see below) in 1948 after the U.S. Air Force was created as a separate service branch.

**Army Air Base Clovis**, Clovis. Established September 1942. Renamed Clovis Army Air Field, April 1943. Renamed Clovis Air Force Base, January 1948. Renamed Cannon Air Force Base (see below), for General John K. Cannon, June 1957.

**Bruns General Hospital**, Santa Fe. Named for Earl H. Bruns, a World War I Army surgeon. Opened December 1942 as a U.S. Army hospital, closed December 1946. Many of the Bataan Death March survivors (a large proportion of whom were native New Mexicans) were treated here upon their return to the States. Became College of Santa Fe after 1946.

**Camp Luna**, Las Vegas. Formerly a New Mexico National Guard training camp, it was used as a U.S. Army training camp during World War II. Luna Army Air Field was co-located here.

**Camp Reid (William C.)**, Clovis. Established 1942 as an Army mobilization and railway training camp, in cooperation with the Santa Fe Railroad, for soldiers who

were to be assigned to railway operating battalions. Believed to have been closed at the end of WWII.

**Cannon Air Force Base**, Clovis. Established September 1942 as Army Air Base Clovis. Renamed Clovis Army Air Field, April 1943. Renamed Clovis Air Force Base, January 1948. Renamed Cannon Air Force Base, for General John K. Cannon, June 1957.

**Carlsbad Army Air Field**, Carlsbad. Established 1942, became Cavern City Air Terminal (municipal airport) after WWII.

**Clovis Air Force Base**, Clovis. Established September 1942 as Army Air Base Clovis (see above). Renamed Clovis Army Air Field, April 1943. Renamed Clovis Air Force Base, January 1948. Renamed Cannon Air Force Base, for General John K. Cannon, June 1957.

**Clovis Army Air Field**, Clovis. Established September 1942 as Army Air Base Clovis. Renamed Clovis Army Air Field, April 1943. Renamed Clovis Air Force Base, January 1948. Renamed Cannon Air Force Base, for General John K. Cannon, June 1957.

**Deming Army Air Field**, Deming. Established 1942, closed 1946. Became Deming Municipal Airport after WWII.

**Fort Sumner Army Air Field**, Fort Sumner. Established 1942, closed 1945, and became Fort Sumner Municipal Airport after the war.

**Fort Wingate**, Gallup. Established 1862, named for Major Benjamin Wingate. Beginning in WWII the fort served primarily as an ammunition depot, but during the 1960s to 1990s was used as a launch site for experimental Redstone, Pershing and other missiles which impacted on White Sands Missile Range several hundred miles to the southeast. Closed 1993 with the intent to transfer the property to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

**Hobbs Army Air Field**, Hobbs. Established 1942, decommissioned May 1948, and became Hobbs Industrial Airpark.

**Holloman Air Force Base**, Alamogordo. Established 1942 as Alamogordo Army Air Field, renamed Holloman Air Force Base, for Col. George Holloman, in 1948 after the U.S. Air Force was created as a separate service branch.

**Kirtland Air Force Base**, Albuquerque. Opened 1941 as Albuquerque Army Air Base (also called Albuquerque Army Air Field). Renamed Kirtland Army Air

Field after Colonel Roy C. Kirtland 1942. Renamed Kirtland Air Force Base in 1947.

**Kirtland Army Air Field**, Albuquerque. Opened 1941 as Albuquerque Army Air Base, but also went by the name Albuquerque Army Air Field. Renamed Kirtland Army Air Field after Colonel Roy C. Kirtland 1942. Renamed Kirtland Air Force Base in 1947.

**Las Cruces Air Force Station**, Las Cruces. Established 1954 as part of a Cold War radar picket line to watch for hostile aircraft which might approach the country's southern border. Closed August 1963 and ultimately became the Doña Ana County Fairgrounds and Speedway.

**Luna Army Air Field**, Las Vegas. Part of Camp Luna (see above).

**Roswell Army Air Field**, Roswell. Established 1941, renamed Walker Air Force Base for General Kenneth N. Walker in 1947, closed 1967. Now Roswell International Air Center, an industrial park housing numerous aviation companies.

**Sandia Base**, Albuquerque. Established on Oxnard Field, a civil airport acquired by the army about 1940, named Sandia Base 1946. A nuclear weapons engineering facility, the base was merged with the adjacent Kirtland Air Force Base in 1971.

**VA Hospital**, Albuquerque. Renamed July 2007 as the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center, for a former employee.

**VA Hospital, Ft. Bayard**. Established as Fort Bayard 1866, named for Civil War Brigadier General George Dashiell Bayard. Became VA Hospital in 1922. Closed in 1965 and subsequently transferred to the State of New Mexico and administered by the New Mexico Department of Health. Officially renamed Fort Bayard Medical Center in 2005.

**Walker Air Force Base**, Roswell. Established 1941 as Roswell Army Air Field, renamed Walker Air Force Base in 1947, closed 1967. Now Roswell International Air Center, an industrial park housing numerous aviation companies.

**White Sands Proving Ground**, White Sands. Established February 1945 as a 100 mile x 40 mile (4,000 sq. mile) missile test range in the Tularosa Basin. Renamed White Sands Missile Range, May 1958, and still in operation today under the latter name.

Website Photos for Plates from Military Bases in New Mexico:  
<https://NMplates.com/MilitaryBases.htm>

## Tribal Plates

The numerous American Indian tribes within the boundaries of the U.S. which are formally recognized by the U.S. government operate to a great degree as independent nations. By virtue of this political standing, some of them handle motor vehicle registration on a tribal basis and issue their own license plates for that purpose. These plates are also valid for use of the registered vehicles outside of the reservation.

Wholly or partly within New Mexico there are some 20 Indian reservations and Pueblos, the latter having essentially the same status as a reservation. None of these are known to have issued plates for registration purposes, though many of the tribes have sold advertising or “booster” plates over the years. As New Mexico has been a rear-plate-only state for over fifty years, the tribal booster plates have generally been mounted on the front bumper.

Website Photos for Tribal Booster Plates:

<https://nmplates.com/BoostersAndToppers.htm>

## Titles and Registration Certificates

The four cities—Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Vegas and Raton—which required licensing of motor vehicles during the Territorial period all issued a license or receipt which served the same function as a registration certificate. The only one of these certificates known to survive today is Chip Chapman’s 1912-1913 Raton registration card, which is illustrated in the chapter on “Pre-states,” and on the NMplates.com website. There is no indication that any of those four towns issued anything that would have corresponded to a title certificate.

Examples of early state-issued registration and title certificates for passenger cars, trucks and motorcycles are illustrated in the respective chapters for the license plates of those types of vehicles and on the NMplates.com website. A concise description of these certificates is given here.

Section 1 of the 1912 New Mexico automobile licensing law (*1912 Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 28) stipulated that upon receipt of application and payment of the required fee, the Secretary of State would issue a (paper) license, and one metal plate, for each automobile registered. Section 4 further provided that with respect to the “... ownership or control of an automobile, the number [i.e., the license plate] borne by it shall be prima facie evidence that it was owned and operated by the person to whom the license therefor was issued.”

In other words, the license was what we now think of as a registration certificate, and the license plate itself was considered to be the title of the vehicle.

The following year the 1913 motor vehicle licensing law (*1913 Laws of New Mexico*, Chapter 19) repealed the 1912 law, and stated only that upon receipt of application and payment of the required fee, the Secretary of State would issue



a certificate of registration and a metal license plate. This time no mention was made of the plate serving as a title.

In fact, the earliest known surviving registration certificates, dating at least as far back as 1915, have a blank form on the back to be filled in and used for transfer of the license to another person, in much the same way as a modern motor vehicle title certificate is used to transfer ownership of a vehicle. Obviously, these were not titles in the way that we know them today, but since a motor vehicle could be licensed only to its owner, use of this form established a record of ownership (i.e., “title”) transfer. These early certificates, incidentally, were printed on card stock, and were only a little larger than a modern credit card.

The exact date that separate title and registration documents were first issued has not been positively established, but from surviving documents we can tell that it must have been sometime between 1924 and 1927. By this time the certificates had changed from the small cards filled out by hand in pen-and-ink, to similar size machine-printed documents on thinner paper.

Website Photos for Titles and Registration Certificates:

<https://NMplates.com/PassengerCar.htm#Registrations>

<https://NMplates.com/Truck.htm#DOCS>

<https://NMplates.com/Motorcycle.htm#Docs>

## **Chauffeur Badges**

Today we almost universally think of a chauffeur as the driver of a limousine, but past usage of the term was considerably broader than that. A chauffeur, in fact, was any person who drove a motor vehicle for hire, carrying persons or cargo. Taxi drivers, bus drivers and commercial truck drivers, for example, were all chauffeurs, and were all required to obtain a chauffeur’s license. In effect, the chauffeur license was what we in New Mexico now call a commercial driver’s license, or CDL.

Neither chauffeur’s licenses nor driver’s licenses were required by the state of New Mexico until January 1, 1938. The requirement was brought about by the *Laws of 1937*, Chapter 110, approved March 15, 1937, but not effective until the first day of following year. [See also the following section, “Operator’s (Driver’s) Licenses,” for more detail on the law, and how it came about.]

In New Mexico, the chauffeur paid an annual fee of two dollars, for which he (or she, but usually he), upon completion of an appropriate examination, received a paper license, and—during the years 1938-1957 only—also received a badge. Each badge bore a serial number which matched the number on the license, and had a pin and clasp on the back so that it could be easily fastened to the driver’s shirt or cap. The shape and design of the badge changed annually, and during at least three years, 1952, 1953 and 1954, more than one design was used within the year. All of this was explicitly spelled out in the law:

“Section 12. *Licenses issued to Operators and Chauffeurs.*

(a) The department [i.e., the Bureau of Revenue] shall issue to every person licensed as [a] ... chauffeur, [a] chauffeur's license ... Every chauffeur, before operating a motor vehicle as a common carrier of persons or property, shall apply for and receive from the department, and at all times while so operating a motor vehicle, shall display in plain sight upon the band of his hat or cap, or upon his outer garment, a chauffeur's badge to be issued by the department, which badge shall be of a different shape or form each year.

(b) Every such license shall bear thereon the distinguishing number assigned to the licensee ...

(c) Every chauffeur's badge shall have a plainly readable distinguishing number assigned to the licensee, which number shall agree with the distinguishing number assigned to its accompanying license certificate stamped or placed thereon. The department shall determine the type and design of the badge to be issued.”

Not only were badges issued annually, but several varieties of 2-year and 3-year badges are known from the late 1940s and early 1950s. Among the most commonly seen are the 1949-1950 and 1949-1951 badges. Additionally, at least three different styles of prototype/sample badges are known, all numbered 00000, and dated 1952, 1952-1953 and 1952-53-54, respectively. The shapes of the samples are different from those of the regularly-issued badges.

Most years, New Mexico badges were made of brass or nickel-plated brass, but during the war years of 1944 and 1945 they were fabricated from laminated cardboard, and painted white with red lettering.

Age limitations for chauffeurs were set forth in Sections 5(a) and 6. In general, a person had to be at least 18 years old to obtain a chauffeur's license, including those who would be driving a “school bus for transportation of pupils to and from school.” On the other hand, anyone driving “a motor vehicle in use as a public passenger carrying vehicle” had to be at least 21 years of age. Presumably this latter category was in reference to conveyances such as interstate and intrastate taxis and passenger buses.

Section 15 of the law, “*Expiration of Licenses,*” provided that all chauffeur licenses would expire on the same date each year as did New Mexico's automobile license plates:

“Every license issued under this Act shall expire upon the same date as is now, or may hereafter be, designated as the expiration date for annual registration for motor vehicles ...”

As stated earlier, New Mexico chauffeur badges exist not only in the usual 1-year style, but also as 2-year and 3-year badges. The following paragraphs examine in greater detail both the introduction of these multi-year badges, and the termination of all badges after 1957.

The 1937 law which first established the requirement for operator (driver's) and chauffeur licenses was updated with minor modifications in 1939, and the licenses issued under these laws were valid for just one year. [*Laws of 1937*, Chapter 110; *Laws of 1939*, Chapter 156] It was therefore necessary to renew the licenses annually on or before their expiration date, which was mandated to be the same as that for motor vehicle license plates (always near the beginning of the calendar year). This changed in 1945 when the licensee was given the option of obtaining (or renewing) an operator or chauffeur license for either one, two, or three years. The respective fees for the operator license were \$1, \$2 and \$3, while those for the chauffeur license were \$2, \$4 and \$6. [*Laws of 1945*, Chapter 40, approved April 7, 1945]

The 1945 law addresses only the *licenses*, with nothing said about multi-year *badges* for chauffeurs. Moreover, an extensive review of contemporary news sources has yet to turn up any reference to them during this time period. Had there been any multi-year badges this early, though, we might expect to see examples such as 1945-46, 1945-1947, 1946-1947, 1946-1948, and so on. The fact that no such badges have surfaced in modern times leads to the reasonable conclusion that there were none, and that a person who received a multi-year license was issued a regular single-year badge for each year during the period for which the license was valid, or perhaps a single badge showing the last year for which it was valid.

On the other hand, 2- and 3-year badges with a starting year of 1948 and 1949 are known, and as far as has been ascertained these are the only multi-year badges ever issued. A very small number of sample badges for 1952-1953 and 1952-53-54 exist, but these apparently were never produced for actual issuance. Thus, the multi-year badges with 1948 and 1949 base years seem to have been a short-lived experiment, reinforcing the belief that other than during this brief period holders of multi-year chauffeur licenses received a standard one-year badge for each year during the license period, or a single badge showing the last year for which the license was valid.

Two different styles of badges were used within each of several years, with 1952, 1953 and 1954 being commonly seen examples. It may be that one style was used for single-year licenses and the other style used for multi-year licenses.

This has not been verified, however, and there may well be some other reason for the multiple styles.

No New Mexico chauffeur badges of any kind are known after 1957, and in fact the 1957 badges are quite scarce even though the serial numbers on the known examples are all rather high. Even 1956 badges are generally less common than those from the earlier years. Why is this? The answer lies in the fact that the requirement for chauffeur badges was eliminated in 1955.

A new law, approved March 23, 1955, with an effective date of July 1, 1955, completely rewrote the requirements for both operator and chauffeur licenses. Operator licenses were now good for two years, and with expiration dates which were for the first time tied to the holder's birth month. Chauffeur licenses were reverted to a one-year validity period, with the expiration date designated as December 31 of each year, while the requirement for the issuance or use of chauffeur badges was entirely omitted.

The one-year fee of \$2 was retained for chauffeur licenses, while operator licenses were \$1 for the first year plus 25 cents for each additional three-month period or fraction thereof. (The proration provision for operator licenses was necessary to account for the fact that not every driver would obtain the initial license in the month of his or her birth.) The law also contained a repeal clause which repealed the prior chauffeur and operator license laws, back to and including the original 1937 law. [*Laws of 1955*, Chapter 179]

Importantly, the repeal clause provided that "... licenses and permits valid under the laws hereby repealed shall remain valid and in effect hereunder until the date of their expiration ..." Consequently, multi-year chauffeur licenses issued as far back as 1953 were still valid until they expired, and some of those issued in early 1955—before the advent of the new law—remained valid until as late as 1957. But because the new law had come into effect just halfway into 1955, relatively few 3-year licenses expiring in 1957 would have been issued, thereby explaining the paucity of 1957 badges seen today. The 1956 badges would have been similarly affected, though to a lesser extent since some of them could have been issued as early as 1954. In other words, all 1956 and 1957 chauffeur license would have been issued before July 1, 1955, and they were probably mostly issued to the licensees around the first of their respective years of issuance (1954 and 1955).

Although the previously issued multi-year chauffeur licenses remained in force until their originally designated expiration dates, one is still inclined to wonder why the state even bothered to issue badges in '56 and '57 since badges were no longer required. We may never know for sure, but a likely scenario is that the out-year badges had been manufactured in advance and issued at the same time as the original license was issued. Consequently, they would have already been in the hands of the license holders before the requirement was rescinded.

Relatively common, and only indirectly related to license plates, New Mexico chauffeur badges have nonetheless found a following among historians and collectors. With their shape and design having changed with each year, and through the incorporation of iconic southwestern and Native American features such as the thunderbird and Zia symbol, they have come to be considered among the most attractive of all American badges of this type.

Website Photos for Chauffeur Badges & Licenses:

<https://NMplates.com/ChauffeurBadgesandLicenses.htm>

## **Operator's (Driver's) Licenses**

Beginning with Albuquerque in 1910, at least three of the four municipalities known to have required the licensing of automobiles during the Territorial period also required that the drivers thereof pass an examination demonstrating that they were capable of properly and safely operating the vehicle. In some cases—the Raton pre-state motor vehicle registrations being a good example—the vehicle registration and the operator's license were one and the same document. After March 15, 1913, when city vehicle registrations were no longer permitted, Raton continued to use the same document strictly as an operator's license.

Oddly, after New Mexico attained statehood in 1912, her earliest motor vehicle laws were focused solely on licensing the vehicles, and said nothing about testing or licensing the drivers. In fact, every evidence is that the state was content to ignore the issue as long as possible. Finally, in 1927, as if to show that she was washing her hands of the matter entirely, New Mexico passed a law which explicitly authorized municipalities to shoulder the responsibility that she herself shunned.

This was codified in the *Laws of 1927*, Chapter 28, approved March 7, 1927. The law as written was brief, with the salient provisions in the first paragraph:

“Section 1. That all municipal corporations in the State of New Mexico, shall have power to prescribe the qualifications for drivers of motor vehicles who are bona fide residents within the limits of municipalities and to give examinations to such drivers and to issue licenses at a reasonable charge, not to exceed One Dollar per driver, to said drivers according to the demands of the public safety and convenience of said municipalities.”

As can be seen, the legislation in no way implemented universal licensing. Only incorporated towns were authorized to license drivers, and even those would do it only if they wanted to.

Interestingly, though, the last paragraph of the law was an emergency clause:

“Section 4. That it is necessary for the preservation of the public health, peace and safety of the inhabitants of the State of New Mexico that the provisions of this Act shall become effective at the earliest possible time, and therefore an emergency is hereby declared to exist, and this Act shall take effect and be in full force from and after its passage and approval.”

Highway crashes and human carnage per mile driven were vastly higher in those days than they are today. This was so much the state of affairs that New Mexico saw fit to declare an emergency, but even that was still not enough for the state to want to get involved. It would be another decade before minds were changed.

In 1937, a quarter century after statehood, the legislature finally decided to jump into the fray by passing a law which required state licensing of drivers (“operators”). Moreover, the law repealed the 1927 law which had previously authorized municipalities to do the licensing, now putting the state firmly in the driver’s seat (so to speak). The legislation became Chapter 110 of the *Laws of 1937*, and contained most of the provisions that we would think of as belonging in such a law today. The statute, which had a tongue-twisting 93-word title, mercifully declared in Section 29 that its short title was the “Uniform Operator’s and Chauffeur’s License Act.” It was approved by the legislature on March 15, 1937, and specified an effective date of January 1, 1938.

The various provisions of Chapter 110 provided for testing of eyesight and driving skills, issuance and renewal of licenses, license fees, age limits, penalties for infractions (suspensions, revocations, fines, etc.), and so forth. Section 12 addressed the issuance of the driver’s license document itself:

“Section 12. *Licenses issued to Operators and Chauffeurs.*

(a) The department [the Bureau of Revenue] shall issue to every person licensed as an operator ... , an operator’s ... license ...

(b) Every such license shall bear thereon the distinguishing number assigned to the licensee ...

Fourteen was the minimum age at which the test could be taken and a license issued, and a 90-day “instruction permit” (learner’s permit) could be obtained by any unlicensed person (at least 14 years of age) prior to taking the exam. The learner was required to have an accompanying licensed driver, and no other persons, in the vehicle with him. Meanwhile, the law charged the New Mexico State Police with the responsibility to “supervise the conduct of all examinations required under the provisions of this Act.”

As in the case of chauffeur licenses, Section 15 of the law, “*Expiration of Licenses*,” provided that all operator’s licenses would expire on the same date each year as did New Mexico’s automobile license plates:

“Every license issued under this Act shall expire upon the same date as is now, or may hereafter be, designated as the expiration date for annual registration for motor vehicles ...”

No operator’s licenses issued through at least the 1940s are known to have included a photo of the licensee, though some of them did bear an imprint of the driver’s index finger. Early New Mexico licenses were not laminated, being simply printed on heavy-weight paper. Most became badly deteriorated from being carried in the person’s wallet, and few have survived in other than tattered condition. Color photos on driver’s licenses were authorized by the state legislature in 1961, but Motor Vehicle Commissioner Benny Sanchez had actually initiated their use without specific authorization a year earlier. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, December 2, 1962, p.18, c.4]

All in all, New Mexico’s first driver’s license law was quite comprehensive, running some fifteen pages in its final printed form, and it had some innovative provisions. One worthy of special note was Section 5(d), which stipulated, in part, that “the department shall not issue an operator’s ... license to any person who is ... an idiot ...” One can only dream of how much safer New Mexico’s roads would be today if such a provision were still in force.

Website Photos for Driver’s Licenses: <https://NMplates.com/DriversLicense.htm>

## **Bicycle Tags**

Given that the founding fathers of New Mexico’s towns probably viewed anything with wheels as a potential source of revenue, it is not surprising to learn that Santa Fe required that bicycles be licensed as early as 1910. Other towns which required licensing of motor vehicles during the Territorial period exempted vehicles propelled by “muscular power,” but Santa Fe made no such exclusion, and folded bicycles into Sub. Sec. 2 of its 1910 motor vehicle ordinance. As near as can be told from the ordinance itself, however, actual license plates were issued only to motor vehicles, and not to bicycles.

As time went by, more and more New Mexico municipalities required the licensing of bicycles and issued tiny license plates for that purpose. Their sizes ranged from about 2" x 2<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" to 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>". It is not known how many cities in the state required such licenses, nor is it known when they first appeared, but news reports confirm that tags were issued by the following towns, at least as early as the years indicated:

1939 Gallup [*Gallup Independent*, July 17, 1939, p.1, c.5]

1948 Las Cruces [*Las Cruces Sun-News*, February 25, 1948, p.2, c.2]

1951 Albuquerque [*Albuquerque Tribune*, April 11, 1951, p.2, c.8]

1951 Las Vegas [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, October 9, 1951, p.1, c.6]

None of the known surviving bicycle plates are as old as that indicated by the Gallup article, but a Santa Fe tag is known to survive from 1946, along with a number of others from the early 1950s and 1960s. These, now more than a half century old, have found a small cadre of aficionados who seek them out.

Website Photos for Bicycle Tags: <https://NMplates.com/Bicycle.htm>

## DAV Key Chain Tags

Beginning in 1941, the Disabled American Veterans organization obtained motor vehicle registration records from most states, and sent unsolicited mailings to owners of registered vehicles. Included in the mailing was a pair of key chain tags designed to look like exact miniatures of the owner's state-issued vehicle license plates.

The recipient was asked to send a donation of 25 cents (or more) to the DAV if he/she wanted to keep the tags. The contribution helped fund DAV programs for veterans. (If the owner did not want them, the tags could be returned to the DAV in an envelope provided for that purpose.) As the years went by, the amount of the requested donation gradually increased to keep pace with inflation.

In return for the donation, the driver received "lost key insurance" from the DAV, the premise of which was that anyone finding keys with a DAV tag attached could drop the keys in any mailbox. The Post Office would send the keys to the DAV, which in turn would look up the license plate number on the miniature tag and mail the keys and tag back to the rightful owner.

The program continued through 1975, when federal privacy laws went into effect to prohibit the release of personal information such as that contained in motor vehicle records. This ended the DAV's ability to obtain the necessary mailing lists, and the program was ended.



The B.F. Goodrich tire company produced similar key chain tags for a few years, and New Mexico tags from this company are known from 1939 through 1941, inclusive. An assortment of other companies produced similar tags as well.

The earliest known New Mexico key chain tags are those of 1939 from B.F. Goodrich, and the latest are the DAV tags of 1973.

Website Photos for DAV & B.F. Goodrich Tags: <https://NMplates.com/DAVTags.htm>

## **Cereal Premiums**

From time to time various breakfast cereal companies have offered toy license plates as premiums, either as inserts in the cereal box itself, or by mail order. One of the best known was the 1953 Wheaties promotion, whereby a set of twelve different toy plates could be ordered for each of four areas of the country—Midwest, Eastern, Southern and Western. The price was 25¢ plus one Wheaties box top for one set of 12 plates, or one dollar and four box tops for all four sets. The latter included a plate for each of the then-48 states of the U.S.

Similar promotions from Wheaties and other cereal companies reappeared from time to time over the next several decades, with the effect that millions of these toys are in circulation even now. They frequently appear on internet auction sites, being hawked as “rare bicycle license plates.” They are by no means rare, but from the standpoint that many kids probably did attach them to their bikes, that moniker could be considered to be accurate, even if not because of any official state or municipal requirement.

## **Chewing Gum Premiums**

In much the same way as baseball trading cards have been packaged with chewing gum for the better part of the past century, the Goudey Gum company of Boston enclosed small license plate trading cards with its gum for several years in the second half of the 1930s. Cards depicting plates from all states and many foreign countries could be found in the gum packages (if you bought enough gum, that is).

In the case of the New Mexico cards, the front side was a reasonably accurate reproduction of a New Mexico license plate for the year in question, though the 1936 cards were printed in the wrong colors. The back side of the card contained various facts about the state, including its nickname, the state flower, and so forth. A few other companies, including some foreign ones, produced similar license plate premiums packaged with gum or candy.

Website Photos for Cereal & Gum Premiums:  
<https://NMplates.com/CerealAndGumPremiums.htm>

## Handicap Parking Permits

For a couple of decades, in the 1970s and 1980s, New Mexico issued handicapped parking permits, or placards, which have some similarities to the state's motorcycle plates of the same era. This unfortunate circumstance was probably brought about by the placards having been stamped out on the same equipment, and using the same metal blanks, as were the motorcycle license plates.

The placards were issued to persons with bona fide medical conditions which authorized them to park their vehicles in handicap-designated parking spaces. The placard was placed on top of the dashboard where it could be seen by law enforcement personnel who might need to verify that the vehicle was authorized to be in a handicap space. (A DMV publication from the period states that these permits were to be affixed to the sun visor.) [*New Mexico License Plates - 1984 Edition*, New Mexico Transportation Department, TAS-10263, Rev. 12/83]

These placards are not, and never have been license plates of any kind. Nonetheless, hardly a day goes by without them popping up on popular internet auction sites under such headings as "Rare! New Mexico Handicapped Motorcycle License Plate!" The "plates" being peddled, of course, are neither rare nor are they license plates, much less motorcycle license plates.

In the 1990s the placards were superseded by blue and white cardboard hang-tags designed to be hung from the vehicle's rear view mirror when the vehicle is parked in a designated handicap space. The current version of the hang-tag bears a photograph of the person to whom it is issued, and is laminated with clear plastic for durability.

Hang-tags are generally issued to persons with less severe and/or temporary disabilities. Persons with greater disabilities can apply for a handicap license plate, on which the internationally recognized wheelchair symbol is embossed. A vehicle with a handicap plate is not required to have or display a hang-tag. A motorcycle version of the handicap plate is also available, but these are quite rare, and, aside from the size and color, look nothing like the parking permit placards of days gone by. A motorcycle plate of this type is illustrated toward the end of the "Motorcycle" chapter.

Website Photos for Handicap Parking Permits:  
<https://NMplates.com/HandicapParkingPermits.htm>

## Billboard Plates

As set forth in the *Laws of 1966*, Chapter 65, billboards within a certain distance of roads and highways in New Mexico are required to be licensed by the state. Since 1966 the licensing authority for this purpose has been the New Mexico State Highway Department (at times referred to as the State Highway Commission, and now called the N.M. Department of Transportation). Licensed billboards were issued

motorcycle-size plates bearing the billboard license number and the designation “New Mexico Highway Commission,” or the Highway Department’s acronym, NMSHD. As in the case of handicap parking placards of the same era, billboard plates of the 1970s were almost certainly stamped out on the same equipment, and using the same blanks as were New Mexico’s motorcycle plates of the time.

Through the 1980s billboard plates were commonly seen nailed to the wooden support posts of these signs, or screwed to supports which were made of steel, and they can occasionally still be found today on older billboards.

Website Photos for Billboard Plates: <https://NMplates.com/Billboard.htm>

## **Advertising Toppers and Booster Plates**

For as long as there have been license plates, there have been advertising “booster” plates and “toppers” made for attachment to the plates. Toppers and boosters fall into four broad categories—those used to publicize schools and their athletic teams, those passed out to promote political candidates, those distributed by civic organizations to advertise New Mexico towns and those given out by merchants to advertise their businesses. Car dealerships account for most of the latter category.

Toppers were manufactured in two principal styles, the simplest of which were painted, printed, or silk screened onto smooth sheet metal. The more intricate style sets forth the letters and graphics in three dimensions by virtue of being made as a casting of aluminum or pot metal.

Website Photos for Toppers & Boosters:  
<https://NMplates.com/BoostersAndToppers.htm>

## **New Mexico State Road Number Signs**

Prior to the late 1920s, most roads in the U.S., including interstate routes, had names rather than highway numbers. For example, what is now U.S. 60, entering New Mexico from Texas, running from Clovis to Quemado, then on the Arizona, was originally called the Ocean-to-Ocean Highway. (The name arose from the fact that the highway originated in New York City and terminated in Los Angeles.) In many cases, though, roads changed names at state lines, and often even within the states.

After a series of meetings over several years, the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) in 1925 recommended the establishment of a Joint Board on Interstate Highways, for the purposes of establishing a nationwide numbered highway system. Secretary of Agriculture Howard M. Gore responded by appointing a panel which operated under the latter name. (The Department of Agriculture was the federal agency with oversight responsibility for federally funded roads at that time.)

The panel developed a plan for numbering both interstate roads (i.e., U.S. Highways) and state roads, and the state and federal officials agreed that implementation of the plan would begin in late 1926. Earlier that year, the New Mexico State Highway Department, through announcements in the press, had begun soliciting ideas for the design of the new State Road number signs. Loosely patterned after the state flag (which itself had been adopted only in 1925), the chosen design was introduced to the public on the cover masthead of the September 1926 issue of the *New Mexico Highway Journal* magazine. The Highway Department began erecting the first of the new markers in November and December of 1926.

These round, embossed steel signs were a little over 16 inches in diameter and had a red Zia symbol on a yellow field (the colors of the flag). The outer perimeter was black, as were the words “STATE ROAD” which appeared just inside the perimeter at the top. The State Road number itself was also black, placed in the center of the Zia symbol.

The Zia on the earliest of these signs had a central circle just  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches in diameter, thus restricting the height of the numerals to barely 3 inches, and allowing for State Road numbers with a maximum of two digits. As New Mexico’s roads became wider and automobile speeds became higher, the road numbers became more and more difficult to read. And within a short time, all of the 2-digit road numbers had been assigned and it became necessary to begin using numbers with 3 digits.

As a result, within a decade or so of the signs’ introduction, the central circle of the Zia was enlarged to 8 inches, which allowed for up to three numerals, 5 inches high. (The overall diameter of the sign was unchanged.) The letters “N.M.” were also added, inside the lower perimeter of the sign. The background color was changed from yellow to white to increase contrast, and, hence, the readability of the signs. In a final design change, the 1950s saw the introduction of reflective material on the background of the central circle, greatly improving nighttime visibility.

But the 1950s also saw embossed steel being replaced by cheaper plywood, and by the 1960s the iconic earlier signs were all but gone from New Mexico’s highways. As they were removed and replaced, the steel signs were typically dumped in burial sites on or near Highway Department maintenance yards. In the decades since, clusters of these signs have been accidentally unearthed from time to time, but with the passage of years each new discovery turns up signs more badly rusted than the last.

Website Photos for State Road Number Signs:  
<https://NMplates.com/StateRoadNumberSigns.htm>

## Official N.M. State Highway Department Road Maps

Apart from the oil companies which passed out free road maps at filling stations, every state had an incentive to produce its own official state road maps touting the scenic attractions along its highways and byways. New Mexico had long been eager to attract tourists and got into the mapmaking business along with the rest. The responsibility naturally fell to the State Highway Department, as these were the folks who knew where the roads were.

The earliest known official New Mexico road map published for distribution outside of the Department itself appeared in 1914, bound into a hard cover book under the title *First Report of the State Engineer of New Mexico*, with a publication date of December 1, 1914. A surprising feature of this map is that it shows that New Mexico was numbering its State Roads more than a decade before there was any national consensus on the need to do so. A few of the roads, or parts of them, still carry the same road numbers today.

The 1914 book, and the map therein, however, had only limited circulation, primarily within the governor's office and various state agencies. By about 1918 a map had been drawn up for more general distribution. No longer bound in a book, it was relatively unadorned and undetailed, but it was utilitarian from the viewpoint of those who wished to navigate the state's growing road network.

Unbound folded maps would be distributed from this point on, with another edition appearing in 1923. (Several reduced-size versions of the 1923 map also appeared in various issues of the *New Mexico Highway Journal* for that year.) Up to this point the maps had been printed on only one side, and only in black and white.

1925 was the first year for two-sided printing, and, when folded, a portion of the back side became the "cover" of the map, with the state seal appearing on the front cover and with a short narrative about the state on the back cover. (Beginning with this year, and continuing for the next quarter century, freshly designed maps would be issued annually.) The 1926 map was of similar design.

The first use of color appeared on the 1927 maps, but it was limited to the cover where it was used to showcase the new State Road number signs which had been introduced in late 1926. Maps for 1928 and 1929 used an almost identical cover design, with a small amount of color appearing on the map itself for the first time in 1929.

1930 ushered in a decade of official New Mexico state road maps with truly stunning cover art, a few examples of which are illustrated later in this chapter and on the NMplates.com website. At times blending both Southwestern and Art Deco motifs, the New Mexico State Highway Department's maps from 1930s are among the most highly sought-after by collectors.

By the late 1950s, though, New Mexico's maps were being issued only sporadically, and the cover designs had devolved from fine art to rather pedestrian photographic images. A century after their introduction, new maps are still issued from time to time, with the responsibility for their production having been partly assimilated by the New Mexico Department of Tourism beginning in the 1980s.

Website Photos for Official State Road Maps:  
<https://NMplates.com/RoadMaps-OfficialState.htm>

## **Brake & Light (Safety Inspection) Stickers**

As early as 1929 the New Mexico Legislature authorized the Motor Vehicle Commissioner to designate selected garages and service stations to serve “as official stations for the testing and adjusting of the lights, brakes and steering equipment on motor vehicles...” The legislation further stipulated that upon completion of inspection and any necessary adjustments to place the vehicle in good working condition, “a certificate of adjustment shall be issued to the driver[s] of such motor vehicles...” [1929 Laws of New Mexico, Chapter 75, § 54]

As called for in the law, the document issued was not a windshield sticker, but a certificate which would have been carried in the car or on the driver's person.

The original legislation said nothing about how often such inspections should be conducted, but by the 1940s a provision had been introduced requiring that the inspections be carried out at least on an annual basis. Also by this time gummed windshield stickers had been introduced.

In the 1950s the safety inspections became much more comprehensive and were being conducted twice a year. A motorist could pull in to most any service station for the inspection, as almost all such stations were licensed to carry out this service. Checks were made of the brakes, lights (including turn signals and brake lights), steering, window glass, windshield wipers, mirrors, and horn. If everything passed the review, the mechanic signed off and applied a sticker to the lower left inside corner of the windshield.

Issued by authority of the Motor Vehicle Division, the inspection stickers (or “brake & light” stickers, as they were more commonly called) were good for six months and bore a printed expiration date. They were additionally coded with a different color for each month so that law enforcement officials could tell from a distance whether the inspection was current.

In the early 1970s the inspections were still valid for only six months, but a multi-year sticker was introduced. The perimeter of the sticker showed several years along with all twelve months of the year. The year and month of expiration were punched out before the sticker was glued to the lower inside corner of the windshield on the driver's side.

Service stations conducted these inspections for a nominal fee of a dollar or two, but where they made their real profit was in rectifying alleged “deficiencies” on the vehicle before issuing the sticker. The most infuriating scam was the requirement that the headlights be “aligned.” Each station had a movable target attached to the far wall of the service bay. The mechanic would simply move the target up or down a few inches to “prove” that the headlights were out of alignment, then adjust the headlights to match. For this, the motorist was charged a fee of four or five dollars, a very hefty sum in those days.

More than one news organization conducted exposés wherein a single vehicle was taken to ten different inspection stations in immediate succession. Every station declared the headlights to be out of alignment, moved the lights to match their own wandering target, and applied the requisite shakedown. Public outrage finally grew to the point in the early '70s that the legislature was forced to completely do away with the so-called safety inspections—and the attendant stickers.

Website Photos for Brake & Light Stickers:

<https://nmplates.com/BrakeAndLightStickers.htm>

## **Dog Tags**

And finally, for those who insist on straying even farther afield from motor vehicle license tags, a few very early New Mexico dog tags are illustrated in this chapter and on the NMplates.com website. Dog tags nowadays serve primarily as proof of rabies vaccination, and as a means to assist in returning lost pets to their owners, but in the early part of the twentieth century many cities required that people obtain a license in order to even own a dog. The owner received a paper license and the dog was given a metal license—in other words, a dog tag—to be attached to the collar. In many cases the license fee was considered to be a tax, and the paper license and dog tag served as proof that the tax had been paid.

Website Photos for Dog Tags: <https://NMplates.com/DogTags.htm>

## **ADDENDA to Miscellany Chapter**

### **Variations in early New Mexico license plates**

Though there are far too many die and stamping variations on New Mexico plates to cover in any great detail, a few of these varieties are nonetheless described elsewhere in this book. In addition to those already reported on, three more worthy of mention are outlined below—the first two because they are common and relatively easy to find, and the third because it is rare and not so easy to find.

In both 1917 and 1919 the numeric dies for plate numbers up through 9999 were about 1¾" wide. Once number 10000 was reached it was necessary to use narrower dies in order to squeeze in the fifth digit. These narrower (or “thinner”) dies measure roughly 1½" wide. This practice was not required before 1917 as prior to that year the state never reached 10,000 registrations. (The two varieties of 1918 plates are even more distinct, and are described in detail earlier in this chapter.)

Other than a slight reduction in height commencing with the 1940 tags, New Mexico had used essentially the same style of numeric dies for almost two decades up through 1950 before switching to thinner dies in 1951. It has long been known that some late-year 1950 Passenger plates had been stamped with the new 1951-style dies, and though it was logical that they should exist on Truck plates as well, until recently no such Truck tags of this style had been confirmed. Finally, in May of 2016, ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner verified their existence when an example, Truck plate #3-3992, appeared on an internet auction site.

Well over a hundred different variations of New Mexico license plates, among numerous types of plates, are illustrated on the NMplates.com website at:

<https://NMplates.com/Varieties.htm>



# Modern Plates

After 1955, in what we refer to as the era of “modern” New Mexico license plates, the state introduced a vast array of new classes and varieties of tags. These number well over a hundred different types, and even today, previously unknown (and sometimes unidentified) types surface from time to time.

While these are outside the principal focus of the early plates covered by this book, certain chapters herein do contain a considerable amount of information on the later plates. This is especially true for Passenger, Truck and Motorcycle tags, along with a few others, where both the narrative and photographic coverage extend up to, or nearly to, the present time. But there are also many other types to consider.

In this chapter we address almost all of the types issued after 1955, but the coverage is not intended to be absolutely all-inclusive. The purpose here is to give the reader a general sense of what’s out there, and to briefly describe a sufficient number of these plates to establish a knowledge base that will be helpful when the next “mystery” plate appears. With few exceptions, plates issued today which are continuations from the “early” era are not discussed here, as they are fully covered in the preceding chapters of this book. Not every plate described in this chapter is illustrated, but you will nonetheless find the majority of them in the accompanying photographs, and on the NMplates.com website.

Keep in mind that the information given here on currently-issued plates was accurate at the time of writing, but is subject to change. If you’re interested in applying for a particular special plate yourself, contact the New Mexico MVD directly or check their website for the latest information.

Modern plates can be grouped into the categories listed below:

**Regular Issue Plates**  
**Special Causes and Professions**  
**Collegiate**  
**Judicial**  
**Political**  
**State Officers and Other State Plates**  
**Veteran**

The individual types are discussed within those categories, and in the above order, starting on the following page.

## Regular Issue Plates

**Agricultural Bus** First authorized in 1967 for buses with a seating capacity of forty passengers or less and which were used exclusively for transporting agricultural laborers to and from their residences and the farm fields where they worked. The registration fee was \$25.00, which presumably was less than that required for buses in regular commercial service. Perhaps more importantly, the law exempted Agricultural Buses from the tariff-filing requirements of the State Corporation Commission [*Laws of 1967*, Chapter 108]. Only known for a few years in the late 1960s to the very early 1970s, existing examples are in trailer plate colors and have a prefix of AB, followed by the Zia and the numeric serial number. The AB plate was issued as late as 1971 but by 1975 had been discontinued, and vehicles serving this purpose were being issued Commercial Bus plates. [*License Plates for 1972*, N.M. Department of Motor Vehicles; and *Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975]  
Website photos: <https://NMplates.com/AgriculturalBus.htm>

**Apportioned** Issued to trucks operating in interstate service. Typically, these are tractor trucks pulling large semi-trailers. Registration fees are based on the miles driven within New Mexico as a proportion of the total miles driven during the year. Plates dating from the 1960s with the PR (prorate) prefix are related to later plates bearing the prefix IR, those with the legend “APPORTIONED” and plates bearing both “APPORTIONED” and the IR prefix. See the section on Interstate” for more details.  
Website photos: <https://NMplates.com/Apportioned.htm>

**Commercial Bus** Known to exist since at least the mid-1960s, these plates are identified by the CB prefix, and were almost always in trailer plate colors. The prefix was followed by the Zia, then by a 1- to 4-digit serial. It is not known whether they were ever used on large buses such as those in city and intrastate bus service, but they were commonly seen on small buses and vans typically used by assisted living centers, nursing homes, and churches. The latter use has sometimes caused them to be incorrectly called “Church Bus” plates. It is believed that the CB series plates were superseded by the PB (Passenger Bus) series beginning in the early 1990s. [See also *License Plates for 1972*, N.M. Department of Motor Vehicles; and *Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975]  
Website photos: <https://NMplates.com/CommercialBus.htm>

**Dealer Manufacturer** Although their use varied from state to state, Dealer Manufacturer plates in New Mexico were issued to manufacturers of buses and trailers. [*Impact, Albuquerque Journal Magazine*, August 24, 1982, p.8, c.2] (The state did not have automobile manufacturers.) It appears that a legislative mandate for such plates in New Mexico originated in the *Laws of 1953*, Chapter 138. New Mexico Dealer Manufacturer plates, though quite rare, are known to

exist from the mid- to late 1970s and are of the form DM\*1234, where “\*” is the Zia symbol. Only 40 of these plates were manufactured in 1975, and probably even fewer issued. The last known official mention of Dealer Manufacturer plates was in 1978. [Dealer Manufacturer plates are explicitly described and illustrated in the publications *Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975; and *1978 New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director] (Regular Dealer plates of this time period have the form DL\*1234.)

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/Dealer.htm#DlrMfg>

**Duplicate** Duplicate plates were issued to replace lost, damaged or stolen plates, and the type is known to have been issued from at least 1964 to 1970. More detail is given on Duplicate plates in the “Miscellany” chapter, where several types of them are illustrated.

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/Duplicate.htm>

**Farm Truck** Originated in 1956 and used the letter “F” as a prefix to the county number. [Deming Headlight, December 16, 1955, p.16, c.3] This classification was for trucks employed primarily on farms and ranches, and on farm-to-market roads. The premise is that such trucks would rack up fewer miles on the state’s highways and therefore cause less wear and tear to them. Farm Truck plates were issued to vehicles with a chassis weight of 3,000 lbs. or higher, and came with registration fees one-third less as compared to those for other trucks. [Press release, “Vehicles Subject to New Mexico Registration,” Benny E. Sanchez, Motor Vehicle Commissioner, July 31, 1964] The “F” was later moved to a position after the Zia but before the serial number. On most, if not all of these later plates, a hyphen (dash) separates the “F” from the numeric part of the serial number.

The last known year for this format was 1974 (1971 base revalidated with 1974 sticker), which corresponded to the last year in which county numbers were used on truck plates. In 1975 the FT prefix was implemented, in the FT\*1234 format. [Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975] Within a few years of this time the Weight Distance Farm Truck (WDFT prefix) plate was introduced (see below), and the latter plate now serves the purpose of the original Farm Truck plate, though with a more complicated method of calculating registration fees.

The FT prefix can be a source of confusion because in some years it has also been used to designate Freight Trailer plates, though probably not in the same years as it was used for Farm Trucks. [Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975 and *New Mexico USA License Plates*, MVD-10264, June 1993] It would not be surprising to learn that the FT prefix was switched from Farm Truck to Freight Trailer in 1993.

Website photos: <https://NMplates.com/FarmTruck.htm>

**Fleet** This is a special class of plate issued to companies with large fleets of motor vehicles. Utilities, telephone companies and the like are prime examples. Most fleet plates are issued as permanent plates so that the company can avoid the expenditure of time and other resources necessary to individually re-register large numbers of vehicles each year. The fact that registration fees are paid collectively contributes to the efficiency of the system. These plates originated in the mid- to late 1980s and have used a standard red-on-yellow base, including the subsequent yellow yucca base. The first release of the Fleet plate had serials consisting of a stacked FL followed by one alpha character, followed by the Zia, and then a 4-digit numeric serial. Recent versions have been reported with the stacked FL and alpha character after the numeric part of the serial. The latest versions have had the words “FLEET-PERMANENT” embossed below the serial. Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/Fleet.htm>

**Freight Trailer** Issued to large trailers, semi-trailers and pole trailers (excludes certain trailers less than 3,500 lbs empty weight), usually pulled by truck tractors. At different times they have been designated by the stacked serial prefixes FR (early) and FT (later). Introduced in 1973 [*Laws of 1972*, Chapter 7, effective Jan. 1, 1973] in a red-on-white base. In the 1990s, while the FT prefix was retained, the words “FREIGHT TRAILER” were also embossed on the plate. All of these now are issued as permanent plates not requiring annual renewal (probably similar to Fleet vehicles), and have the word “PERMANENT” embossed on the plate as well. Sometimes a sticker bearing the designation “PRM” (for “Permanent”) will be seen in the sticker box. The FT prefix can be a source of confusion because in some years it has also been used to designate Farm Truck plates, though probably only the years that FR was used on Freight Trailer plates. [*Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975; and *New Mexico USA License Plates*, MVD-10264, June 1993] It would not be surprising to learn that the FT prefix was switched from Farm Truck to Freight Trailer in 1993. Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/FreightTrailer.htm>

**Handicapped** First authorized by the *Laws of 1973*, Chapter 22, holders of this plate were authorized to park not only in handicapped-designated spaces, but also for unlimited periods in parking zones otherwise restricted as to the length of time parking was normally permitted. They were additionally exempted from paying parking meter fees. However, the vehicle was still prohibited from being parked in any No Parking zone, including those in which parking was prohibited during certain hours of the day. Now officially called a “Mobility Limitation” plate, it displays the internationally recognized wheelchair symbol and is available for use on motor vehicles (including motorcycles) owned by a person with a significant limitation to his or her mobility. Currently this is defined as a person who:

1. Cannot walk 100 feet without stopping to rest; or
2. Cannot walk without the use of a brace, cane or crutch or without assistance from another person, a prosthetic device, a wheelchair or other assistive device; or

3. Is restricted by lung disease to such an extent that the person's forced respiratory volume, when exhaling for one second, when measured by spirometry, is less than one liter or the arterial oxygen tension is less than sixty millimeters on room air at rest; or
4. Uses portable oxygen; or
5. Has a severe cardiac condition; or
6. Is so severely limited in the ability to walk due to an arthritic, neurologic or orthopedic condition that the person cannot ascend or descend more than ten stair steps.

The condition must be certified by a licensed physician on form MVD10270, which is also the form used to apply for the plate. In the past, vanity plates with the wheelchair symbol could be obtained through this same certification process [1978 *New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director], but it is unclear whether this is still the case. There is no fee for the plate, which is available in both automobile and motorcycle sizes. Use of the plate allows the vehicle to be legally parked in a handicap-designated parking space.

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/Handicap.htm>

**Note:** Persons with less severe and/or temporary disabilities are issued temporary handicap hang-tags which are hung from the rear view mirror while parked. Please see the section on "Handicap Parking Permits" in the "Miscellany" chapter for more details on these.

**House Trailer** Using the "H" prefix, the Zia and a numeric serial, this type was introduced in 1955, the closing year of the "early" license plate era. [Albuquerque Journal, December 12, 1954, p.42, c.6] Stated by the DMV in 1964 as being "issued to all camper or dwelling type house trailers," registration fees were based on the number of axles. [Press release, "Vehicles Subject to New Mexico Registration," Benny E. Sanchez, Motor Vehicle Commissioner, July 31, 1964] The last use of it was a 1971 base revalidated with a 1974 sticker (example in author's collection), which was the year before numerous New Mexico license plate types were revamped. In DMV publications from 1975 the type is no longer seen, and in its place is the MH prefix for "Mobile Home." [Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 *License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975]

The MH plate actually first appeared in 1973, however, and there was a two-year overlap during which some existing H-prefix plates could be renewed, such that both H and MH plates were in use concurrently. Whereas House Trailer (H) plates were renewed annually, the subsequent Mobile Home and Manufactured Home (MH) tags were permanent plates. Please see the sections on Mobile Home and Manufactured Home plates for more details on those types.

There was a logical reason for the introduction of this series of plates in 1955 even though many house trailers never went anywhere. Under New Mexico law at that time, as long as a house trailer was on wheels— regardless of whether it was mobile or stationary—the owner paid only the vehicle registration fee for a House Trailer plate. Once the wheels were removed and the trailer was placed on a permanent foundation, the license plate was no longer required but the trailer was then subject to property tax. [*Farmington Daily Times*, April 28, 1959, p.1, c.1] One way or the other the tax man was going to take a bite, but the annual license plate was usually cheaper than paying property taxes. Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/HouseTrailer.htm>

**Interstate** Issued to trucks operating in interstate service and include plates bearing the prefix IR, the legend “APPORTIONED,” and plates bearing both “APPORTIONED” and the IR prefix. Typically, these are tractor trucks used to pull large semi-trailers. Registration fees are based on the miles driven within New Mexico as a proportion of the total miles driven during the year. These plates are related to those from the 1960s with the PR (prorate) prefix. IR tags are also known as “reciprocity” plates. [*Impact, Albuquerque Journal Magazine*, August 24, 1982, p.8, c.2] The current IR prefix is actually an abbreviation for IRP, which is the USA-Canada International Registration Plan. IR plates are used for trucks operating interstate within the U.S., as well as those traveling cross-border into the Canadian provinces. Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/Apportioned.htm>

**LPG** During the gasoline shortages precipitated by the Arab oil embargo of the 1970s, New Mexico for a short time had a special license designation for vehicles which ran on liquified petroleum gas (LPG). The designation was on the validation sticker only, which was applied to regular-issue license plates. Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/LPG.htm>

**Manufactured Home** Originally introduced in 1955 as the H-prefix House Trailer plate (but also used at times for camper trailers [Press release, “Vehicles Subject to New Mexico Registration,” Benny E. Sanchez, Motor Vehicle Commissioner, July 31, 1964]) the trailer manufacturing industry was sensitive to the fact that the term “house trailer” had come to carry a negative connotation (as in “trailer trash”). Industry representatives lobbied state officials, ultimately convincing them to change the name to “Mobile Home” in the mid-1970s, and to redesign the license plates with a corresponding stacked MH prefix. Even that was insufficient to completely tamp down the trailer trash image so the industry went on yet another campaign to change the name once more. The chosen buzz word this time was “Manufactured Home,” which happened to have the same initials, making it unnecessary to change the alpha prefix. Later, in the early 1990s, the words “MANUFACTURED HOME” were embossed in full on the plates, while still retaining the MH prefix to the serial number. The same plates have been issued subsequently with the MH moved into a suffix position. Manufactured Home plates have been issued on several different yellow bases, as well as on the balloon base.



Mobile Home tags were introduced as permanent plates in 1973, and as far as is known all Manufactured Home tags have been permanent plates as well. Please see the sections on House Trailer and Mobile Home plates for more details on these types. Website Photos:

<https://NMplates.com/MobileHomeAndManufacturedHome.htm>

**Mobile Home** “Mobile Home,” with the stacked MH prefix, is the designation which in 1973 superseded the original House Trailer designation (H prefix) of 1955, and which was itself later eclipsed by the Manufactured Home designation in the early 1990s. All of these names referred to plates used for the same purpose. It appears that a 1972 change in the law affecting the way taxes were collected on mobile homes played a part in prompting the introduction of the first MH plates in 1973. These were undated permanent plates (good until the trailer was sold), red on reflective white, with a stacked MH prefix followed by the Zia and a numeric serial. These new MH plates were for trailer houses larger than 8 by 40 feet. [*Laws of 1972*, Chapter 86, effective Jan. 1, 1973; revised by *Laws of 1973*, Chapter 27, Sec. 1.D; See also *Albuquerque Journal*, Feb. 15, 1973, p.A3, c.5]

Existing House Trailer plates with the H prefix were on a 1971 base and could be renewed with stickers through 1974 (example in author’s collection), though it is uncertain whether that was true for all trailers or only those under 8 x 40 feet. In any case there was a two-year overlap during which both the H-prefix and the MH-prefix plates were in use.

In 1975 there was a general reissue of almost all types of non-passenger plates in a red-on-yellow base, but the MH plates remained red on white until about 1978 when they, too, began to be issued in a red-on-yellow base. All of these were permanent plates (without stickers), so both colors (including variations in style of both colors) were in use concurrently for a number of years. [*Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975; and *1978 New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director] Mobile Home plates were superseded in about 1993 by Manufactured Home plates, which are described in the section immediately above. Website Photos:

<https://NMplates.com/MobileHomeAndManufacturedHome.htm>

**Paper Plate** A combination of metal shortages and bureaucratic bungling resulted in the state penitentiary running out of materials with which to manufacture license plates during the 1974 license year. For a period of time the state was forced to print up thousands of red-on-white paper plates and distribute them in lieu of metal plates. After about two months a new supply of metal blanks was received by the prison, and a metal plate bearing the same serial number as was on the paper plate was mailed out to each person who had earlier received a paper tag. The serial numbers involved ran from roughly BCW-001 to BFC-999 [records of ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner], and the replacement metal plates bore an embossed “74” instead of the “72” that was on the base plates previously in use. Once all of the paper plates had been replaced, the state reverted back to the former base with the embossed “72.” Not all paper plates in the aforementioned series were issued, and many of them went unused, including a consecutive set of one hundred (BFC-001 to BFC-100) in the author’s collection. Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/PaperPlate.htm>

**Passenger Bus** Carrying a PB prefix, these are believed to have originated in the mid-1960s with the CB (Commercial Bus) prefix. It is not known whether they were ever used on large buses such as those in city and intrastate bus service, but they were commonly seen on small buses and vans typically used by assisted living centers, nursing homes, and churches. Evidence indicates that the CB series plates were superseded by the PB (Passenger Bus) series beginning in the early 1990s. The plates are known to exist on both the standard yellow yucca base and the balloon base, both with embossed red characters. The words “PASSENGER BUS” are embossed beneath the serial. Both varieties have a PB prefix, and typically the yellow plates have a Zia separating the prefix from the rest of the serial while the balloon plates do not. It has been reported that the “PB” has been seen as a suffix, but this has not been confirmed.

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/PassengerBus.htm>

**Prorate truck** Bearing the PR prefix, they were issued to trucks operating in interstate service. Typically, these are tractor trucks pulling large semi-trailers, though PR tags were also used on interstate buses. [*New Mexico License Plates - 1984 Edition*, New Mexico Transportation Department, TAS-10263, Rev. 12/83] Registration fees are based on the miles driven within New Mexico as a proportion of the total miles driven during the year. These plates are confirmed from at least as early as 1964, but may have appeared soon after the enabling law was passed in 1963, continuing into the late 1980s with the PR prefix. [*Laws of 1963*, Chapter 174, effective March 18, 1963; Press release, “Vehicles Subject to New Mexico Registration,” Benny E. Sanchez, Motor Vehicle Commissioner, July 31, 1964]. Interestingly, the colors on the PR-prefixed plates changed virtually every year, and were issued in some colors never seen on any other New Mexico license plates. They are related to plates bearing the embossed prefix IR, the embossed legend “APPORTIONED,” and plates bearing both “APPORTIONED” and the IR prefix. Also known as “reciprocity” plates, [*Impact, Albuquerque Journal Magazine*, August 24, 1982, p.8, c.2] today’s IR tags are issued to trucks operating under the USA-Canada International Registration Plan (IRP), and have superseded the PR series plates. See the “Interstate” section for more details.

**Important Note:** Though commonly—but erroneously—called “semis” or “semi-trucks,” there is no such thing as a semi-truck. The correct full name of the configuration is “tractor-trailer” or “tractor-semi-trailer.” A trailer (sometimes called a “full trailer”) has one or more axles with wheels at both the front and back. A semi-trailer has one or more axles with wheels only at the back end, and the front end is supported by the tractor which pulls it. In states which allow “doubles,” i.e., a tractor pulling two trailers at once, the trailer attached to the tractor is almost always a semi-trailer, and the one following is always a trailer (full trailer).

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/ProrateTruckProrateTrailer.htm>

**Prorate Trailer** Essentially identical in purpose to the Prorate truck plate described immediately above, but for large trailers and semi-trailers rather than for the truck tractors which pull them. Bears a prefix of PT followed by a numeric serial, and is known to have been issued from at least 1964 through 1975. [*Laws of 1963*, Chapter 174, effective March 18, 1963; Press release, “Vehicles Subject to New Mexico Registration,”



Benny E. Sanchez, Motor Vehicle Commissioner, July 31, 1964 and *Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975] Many of these were issued in unusual colors similar to the Prorate (PR) truck plates.  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/ProrateTruckProrateTrailer.htm#PRTTr>

**Recreational Vehicle** More commonly referred to as an RV plate, this class of tag was originally introduced in 1975 for motor homes of various sizes that are typically used only for camping and other vacation travel purposes. [*Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975] Because they are theoretically driven fewer miles than other vehicles, and therefore cause less wear and tear on the highways, lower registration fees were established for them. As it turned out, many people have circumvented the law by registering their everyday drivers (especially vans and similar vehicles) as RV's in order to save a few bucks on the annual registration fees.

The RV concept was actually first advanced in 1972 [*Laws of 1972*, Chapter 27, effective Jan. 1, 1973] in part to solve a problem that existed not in New Mexico, but in certain other jurisdictions. Some states considered motor homes, camper trailers and similar vehicles to be “commercial” vehicles and demanded that New Mexicans using them buy license plates when passing through those states. An RV designation would exempt out-of-state motorists from the requirement. The 1973 legislature therefore subsequently authorized the DMV to issue 1974 renewal stickers inscribed with a Recreational Vehicle designation to all persons who requested them. These were issued without extra charge, and in lieu of a regular 1974 sticker at the time of application for 1974 registration. [*Albuquerque Journal*, December 5, 1973, p.A12, c.3]

Surviving examples of these silver-on-dark-blue anodized stickers are known on trailer, truck and house trailer plates. Examples are illustrated later in this chapter and on the NMplates.com website. The inscription is “REC. VEHICLE” and the sticker serial number has a prefix of RV.

The following year (1975) the purpose-made RV plate was introduced on the red-on-yellow base inaugurated that year for most non-passenger plates. The serial layout consisted of a stacked RV followed by an alpha character, the Zia, and four numeric digits. By the early 1990s the type was on a yellow yucca base with the stacked RV and alpha character moved to a suffix position.

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/RecreationalVehicle.htm>

**Rental Trailer** Very small numbers of plates dating as far back as the 1960s are known to exist with an RT prefix, which stands for “Rental Trailer.” [Press release, “Vehicles Subject to New Mexico Registration,” Benny E. Sanchez, Motor Vehicle Commissioner, July 31, 1964] The earliest verified examples are from 1963, and the latest from 1984.  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/RentalTrailer.htm>

**Special Permit** Exists in the red-on-yellow colors and general style of 1965-1968 era tags, but is undated. “SPECIAL PERMIT” is silk screened in red at top. Probably issued for trucks and trailers carrying oversize/overweight loads. [See also *Laws of 1971*, Chapter 255 for later regulation of Special Permits.]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/SpecialPermit.htm>

**Temporary** Typically printed on paper or card stock, temporary tags are received when a motor vehicle is bought from either a new or used car dealer. The tag is good only for a limited amount of time—perhaps 30 days or so—giving the buyer sufficient opportunity to secure regular plates from the MVD. Even though the earliest known temporary plate is from 1964, the ephemeral nature of both their use and the material they’re made of pretty much guarantees that few will survive. It is therefore virtually certain that they were in use long before 1964 and earlier examples simply have not yet surfaced. That being the case, temporary plates may not actually be “modern” tags in our sense of the word. Much more information about them will be found in the “Miscellany” chapter, along with color photos.

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/Temporary.htm>

**Undercover** Also called “coverup” plates, they are regular passenger plates issued to vehicles used by undercover law enforcement. Registration data is kept out of the MVD database so as to protect the operatives’ cover. [*Impact, Albuquerque Journal Magazine*, August 24, 1982, p.8, c.2]

**Vanity** Vanity tags are technically not “regular issue” plates but we have included them in this section because they are so widely used nowadays. Officially called “Prestige” plates or “Personalized” plates, they got off to a bumbling, bureaucratic start upon their introduction in 1967.

Having learned that Texas had generated a huge revenue stream by offering vanity plates in that state at a \$10 surcharge, New Mexico legislators decided to do the same. Texas had sold 20,000 of the special plates in 1966, raking in \$200,000, and New Mexico solons wanted in on the bonanza. State Senator Harold L. Runnels introduced the necessary bill [*Albuquerque Journal*, February 28, 1967, p.B-15, c.3], which was soon passed into law. [*Laws of 1967*, Chapter 65, approved March 13, 1967]

Not content with the paltry \$10 that Texas charged, New Mexico officials set the price at \$25, the equivalent of about \$194 in 2020 dollars. The scheme backfired, with just 43 personalized tags being sold in 1967 and 147 in 1968, making examples from both years exceedingly rare. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, July 7, 1969, p.5,c.2] The first one issued, “VIC-1,” went to Victor Salazar of Albuquerque on June 16, 1967. [*Gallup Independent*, July 21, 1967, p.2, c.2]

Finally realizing that they had priced themselves out of the market, the surcharge fee was reduced to \$15 on June 20, 1969 [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, July 7, 1969, p.5,c.2], though it was a number of years before sales would become high enough to be the cash cow the officials had originally hoped for. (The extra fee was still only \$17 as of 2020, with sales numbering in the tens of thousands.)

When first made available in 1967 a prestige plate was allowed a maximum of only 6 characters [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, December 29, 1968, p.C-7, c.4], and technically had to consist of three letters and three numbers, though this was interpreted loosely by the DMV. Nonetheless, most of the few known surviving examples from 1967-1968 have serials consisting of one to three letters followed by one to three numeric digits. Within a few years the maximum number of allowable characters was increased to 7, and with any combination of letters and numbers.

Any owner of a motor vehicle, including a motorcycle, may apply for the issuance of a vanity plate today. The traditional yellow, the turquoise centennial and the chile designs are all available as vanity plate bases for cars, trucks and motorcycles. The balloon base was formerly available for vanity plates used on cars and trucks, but that base was discontinued with the introduction of the turquoise base.

At one time, vanity plates were issued to trailers, but this is no longer the case. The author's wife, in fact, had the plate "HORSES" on her horse trailer for more than 25 years, until an MVD official demanded its removal a few years ago when the registration was up for renewal. The plate now resides on the pickup which pulls the horse trailer.

Today a vanity tag may have from 1 to 8 characters for a turquoise plate, 1 to 7 characters for the yellow yucca tag and 1 to 6 characters for a chile plate (1 to 6 characters for a yellow or turquoise motorcycle plate, and only 1 to 5 for a chile motorcycle). The permitted characters originally included the Zia symbol, spaces, apostrophes and dashes, along with as any combination of letters and numbers. Since about 1977, New Mexico vanity plates could also include the Spanish Ñ. However, since 2018, the MVD no longer allows any of the aforementioned special characters. (In recent years, the Ñ was not available for motorcycle plates, but a few seemingly authentic examples from the early 1980s are known to exist.)

A requested character set may be rejected if:

1. It duplicates the serial number of any existing plate. (Characters other than letters and numerals are considered non-significant. For example, a plate with the characters A-B\*C D is considered to be identical to one with the characters ABCD); or
2. The MVD finds it to be derogatory or obscene; or
3. It falsely states or implies that the vehicle or the driver represents the authority of a governmental agency or official.

In addition to regular registration fees, there is an extra annual fee of \$17.00 initially and upon each regular renewal. Application is made either online at the MVD website, or by mail on form MVD10199, which has boxes for entry of up to three choices of characters. For mail-in applications, the Department will check the choices in the order given, and will issue a plate with the first of those choices that is not already taken. If all three choices are taken, the application and payment will be returned to the vehicle owner. The on-line system instantaneously notifies the applicant if a choice is already in use (or unacceptable) and will not proceed until the unacceptable choice is changed or deleted. Once an application is accepted, the MVD states that it will take 8 to

10 weeks for the special plate to arrive. In practice, the period can vary from as little as 3 weeks to as much as 12 weeks. Website Photos:

<https://NMplates.com/Vanity.htm>

<https://NMplates.com/Motorcycle.htm#MC%20Vanity>

**Weight Distance** This class of plate was introduced about 1980 and has always carried a WD prefix. (There are unconfirmed reports of these plates also having the WD in a suffix position). Current plates have the words “WEIGHT DISTANCE” embossed in the plate. The vehicles using the plates are almost exclusively very heavy trucks such as dump trucks. The registration fees are based on a formula which multiplies the gross weight rating of the truck times the number of miles driven. The owner must periodically submit a form to the MVD, stating and certifying the actual mileage driven by the vehicle during the applicable reporting period.

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/WeightDistance.htm>

**Weight Distance Farm Truck** Identical in concept to the regular Weight Distance plate described immediately above, the plate is intended for trucks used primarily on farms, ranches and farm-to-market roads. It has replaced the earlier Farm Truck plate (see above). The Weight Distance Farm Truck plate has been issued in various configurations since about 1980, with a common characteristic being a prefix or suffix of WDFT or WDF. Beginning in the early 1990s the embossed words “WT. DIST. FARM TRUCK” were added to the plate. Registration fees are calculated in essentially the same manner as described above for the regular Weight Distance plate. Website Photos:

<https://NMplates.com/WeightDistanceFarmTruck.htm>

**Wholesaler** Issued to dealers (wholesalers) who typically buy up used vehicles from new car dealers who have taken them in on trade, but who do not wish to resell them on their own lots. These vehicles are then often sold at large, well-attended auctions where used car dealers buy them as inventory for their own lots. Wholesaler plates apparently were issued for only a very short time in the early 1980s. The type is not described in DMV publications as late as 1978, and a 1993 MVD publication explicitly states that regular dealer plates were being issued to wholesalers by the latter date. [1978 *New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director; and *New Mexico USA License Plates*, MVD-10264, June 1993]

The only known surviving example is from 1982 and bears a plate serial of WS\*0103. That plate is almost identical in appearance to truck plates issued during the 1977-1981 era except for the unique “WS” serial prefix and an embossed “82” in the lower left corner. Website Photos:

<https://NMplates.com/Wholesaler.htm>

**Wrecker** Wreckers (tow trucks) in the past have been regulated by the State Corporation Commission (SCC), and since 1999 by the Public Regulation Commission (PRC). It is perhaps because of this special regulatory oversight that wreckers have, at times, been required to display special license plates. It appears that the legislative mandate for such plates originated in the *Laws of 1953*, Chapter 138. The earliest known wrecker plate is from 1971, but there were always so few of them that there are probably earlier ones which simply

have not yet been found. The 1971 has a “W” prefix and is in truck colors, while later ones, beginning no later than 1975, have a “WR” prefix and are in the format (including colors) of truck plates. According to a 1984 MVD publication, wrecker plates “MUST BE DISPLAYED ON REAR OF VEHICLE BEING TOWED, NOT REAR OF TOWING VEHICLE.” [License Plates for 1972, N.M. Department of Motor Vehicles; and *Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975; and *New Mexico License Plates - 1984 Edition*, New Mexico Transportation Department, TAS-10263, Rev. 12/83.]

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/Wrecker.htm>

**Year of Manufacture** A “YOM” plate is not a modern plate but the concept of its use is relatively modern. The Motor Vehicle Division will register and permit the use of year-of-manufacture license plates on motor vehicles that are 30 years old or older. Upon making application to the MVD, the MVD representative is required to inspect the year-of-manufacture plate to ensure that it is in good condition and that the number on the plate is not already assigned or in use. To qualify for use, the year-of-manufacture plate must be an authentic plate issued in New Mexico during the motor vehicle’s model year. This is all well and good except that it is frequently the case that problems arise because few MVD personnel know what old New Mexico license plates look like. (They should have a copy of this book.)

There is nothing in the law requiring that a YOM tag be the appropriate type of plate for the vehicle being registered. The result is that from time to time one sees incongruous pairings such as a House Trailer plate on a 1965 Mustang or a Prorate Truck plate on a 1970s muscle car. In such cases it’s likely that neither the registrant nor the MVD knew what the plate really was.

In addition to regular registration fees, there is a fee of \$27.00 at the time of application for the plate. Only the regular registration fees are due at the time of renewal. Standard modern registration stickers are issued at the time of initial registration and with each subsequent renewal. These can be affixed to the YOM plate, though many people prefer not to deface their vintage plates in this way. An alternative frequently used is to fabricate a metal tab which can be secured using a screw through one of the plate’s bolt holes. The tab is placed behind the plate, but extending either up or to the side so that the sticker can be affixed there in full view.

This method of display is probably not technically correct from the viewpoint of the MVD, but to date there have been no reported complaints. Upon the sale or transfer of a motor vehicle bearing a year-of-manufacture plate, the plate may remain with the vehicle and be transferred to the new owner upon payment of a \$12.00 fee in addition to regular registration fees. Form MVD11317 is used for the application. [Laws of 1998, Ch. 25, § 1]

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/YearofManufactureYOM.html>

**30-Day Non-Resident Seasonal Agricultural Permit** During the 1960s non-residents employed as seasonal agricultural workers in New Mexico could apply for a special thirty-day permit registering their foreign (i.e., out-of-state) vehicles in this state in lieu of a permanent registration. The permit was issued as a windshield sticker. [New Mexico DMV publication, *Procedures for Titling and*

*Registering Motor Vehicles in New Mexico - 1964*] Website Photos:

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/30DayAgPermit.htm>

## Special Causes and Professions

**4-H** Anyone can apply for the plate, whether a 4-H member or not. The plate displays the 4-leaf clover symbol followed by a four-digit serial number. In addition to regular registration fees, there is an additional \$37.00 fee payable upon initial registration and each renewal. Twenty-five dollars of the \$37.00 fee collected is distributed to New Mexico State University for the New Mexico State 4-H Office and for 4-H youth programs in the state. Application is made on form MVD10104. [Laws of 2009, Ch. 87, § 1]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/4H.htm>

**Adopt a Child** The Child Adoption Awareness Plate promotes adoption of children in the State of New Mexico, and the applicant need not be an adoptive parent. The serial number consists of four digits followed by the stacked suffix AC. In addition to regular registration fees, there is an additional \$12.00 fee payable upon initial registration. At the time of this writing, the additional \$12.00 was not required for subsequent renewals. Use Form MVD10101 to apply. [Laws of 2007, Ch. 87, § 1]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/AdoptAChild.htm>

**Amateur Radio Operator** Strictly speaking, amateur (or “ham”) radio plates are not classified as “modern” plates as they have been continuously available since 1953. Ham plates are available to any New Mexico resident who holds in good standing an official amateur radio station license issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). [Persons using Citizen Band (CB) radios no longer receive licenses from the FCC, but in any case are *not* (and never have been) eligible for the Amateur Radio Operator plate.] The plate serial number consists of the official call letters of the applicant as assigned by the FCC. The words “AMATEUR RADIO OPERATOR” appear on the plate, though this has not always been the case. The first appearance of the words was in about 1991. See the “Amateur Radio” chapter for more information.

The stated legislative purpose for the issuance of special Radio Operator registration plates is to be able “to readily identify personnel in aid of the performance of necessary duties for civil defense in the communications field.” Amateur Radio plates are available in both the traditional yellow yucca base and the newer turquoise base. During the years that the balloon base was in use, it was available for ham radio plates, too, but of course that style has now been discontinued. There is a fee of \$5.00 upon initial application, and upon each regular renewal. This fee is in addition to regular registration fees. Form MVD10200 is used to apply for ham plates. Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/AmateurRadio.htm>

**Bass Fishing** Officially called the “Fish New Mexico” Bass Fishing plate, any person may apply for it. The plate, showing a picture of a bass on the left side, has a 4-digit serial followed by a stacked suffix of GF (for Game & Fish).



There is a first-year special plate fee of \$27.00, plus \$10.00 for each renewal year, all in addition to regular registration fees. Fifteen dollars (\$15.00) of the initial fee goes to the Bass Habitat Management Program of the Game Protection Fund. The application form is MVD10105. [*Laws of 2009*, Ch. 85, § 1]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/BassFishing.htm>

**Blood Donor** Available to any motor vehicle owner, the plate promotes blood donation. The serial number is four digits with a stacked suffix of UB, which stands for United Blood Services. In addition to regular registration fees, there is a special plate fee of \$37.00 initially and upon each renewal. Twenty-five dollars of the additional fee goes to the New Mexico Department of Health to fund blood donation outreach and education. Form MVD11308 is used to apply. [*Laws of 2011*, Ch. 7, § 1]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/BloodDonation.htm>

**Boy Scouts Centennial** The Boy Scouts of America Centennial Plate commemorates the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Boy Scouts of America (on February 8, 1910). The 4-digit serial number is followed by the stacked letters BSA. The plate is available to any motor vehicle owner for a \$12.00 fee for initial issuance in addition to regular motor vehicle registration fees. At the time of this writing there is no additional special plate fee for subsequent renewals. There is no requirement to have any affiliation with the BSA to apply for the plate. The application form is MVD10103. [*Laws of 2009*, Ch. 89, § 1]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/BoyScouts.htm>

**Breast Cancer Awareness** Available to any motor vehicle owner for an initial fee of \$37.00 (in addition to regular vehicle registration fees) and upon each annual renewal. Of the \$37.00 fee, \$25.00 is transferred to the New Mexico Department of Health for the purpose of funding breast cancer screening, outreach and education. Form MVD11244 is used to make application. The plate displays the looped pink ribbon breast cancer awareness symbol and has a 4-digit serial with a stacked suffix of BC. [*Laws of 2008*, Ch. 34, § 1]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/BreastCancerAwareness.htm>

**Children's Trust Fund** Any owner of a motor vehicle (including a motorcycle) may apply for this special plate featuring artwork of the children of New Mexico. Regular size plates have a stacked prefix of KID followed by a 4-digit serial. Motorcycle plates have a stacked prefix of KID, a 3-digit serial and a suffix of K. In addition to regular registration fees, a fee of \$42.00 is collected (\$22.00 for motorcycles). Twenty-five dollars of the fee (\$15.00 for motorcycle plates) is distributed to the Children's Trust Fund, the purpose of which is to develop innovative children's projects dedicated to preventing abuse and neglect of children; provide medical, psychological and other appropriate treatment for children who are victims of abuse or neglect; and to develop community-based services aimed at the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. Some of the monies are used for projects of the Next

Generation Fund. Application form is MVD11195 (including motorcycles).

[*Laws of 1993*, Ch. 80, § 1. Motorcycle version, *Laws of 2005*, Ch. 123, § 1] Website Photos:

<https://NMplates.com/ChildrensTrustFund.htm>

**Citizens Band Radio** The Citizens Band, or “CB” radio service was created in the 1940s as a means to provide short-range two-way radio service for businesses and individuals. Until 1983 a license was required to operate a CB radio, and with the issuance of the license the Federal Communications Commission also issued a call sign consisting of three letters (the first of which was always “K”) followed by four numerals (e.g., KAB1234). From about the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s New Mexico made available to CB licensees special motor vehicle license plates which bore their respective call signs. [A fourth letter was later appended to the call sign alpha prefix (e.g., KABC1234), about the same time that New Mexico stopped issuing CB plates.]

The issuance of the FCC license was perfunctory in that all a person had to do to get a CB license was fill out a short form and mail it in. There was no technical test and no requirement to have any knowledge of radio, or of the equipment being used. Consequently, the FCC ultimately decided in 1983 that issuing licenses and call signs served no purpose and the practice was terminated. New Mexico ceased issuing CB license plates even before the FCC ceased issuing CB call signs. After the special plates were no longer available, and before the FCC stopped issuing CB call signs, some CB licensees obtained vanity plates with their call signs, but these of course are vanity plates, not CB plates.

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/CitizensBandRadio.htm>

**Commercial Radio/TV Station** Authorized in 1959, these plates were made available to commercial radio and TV stations and bore the FCC call sign of the station. [*Laws of 1959*, Chapter 155. The law stated “The purpose for the issuance of such special license plates is to readily identify personnel in aid of the performance of necessary duties for civil defense in the communications field.”] Stations which used them on more than one vehicle typically had a unique suffix number on each plate. These plates are described in DMV publications from 1964, but by 1972 they were no longer listed. [Press release, “Vehicles Subject to New Mexico Registration,” Benny E. Sanchez, Motor Vehicle Commissioner, July 31, 1964 and *License Plates for 1972*, N.M. Department of Motor Vehicles] Usually in trailer plate colors, they were probably discontinued after 1967 with the advent of vanity plates, which could be used for the same purpose.

Website Photos: <https://nmplates.com/Radio-TVStation-Commercial.htm>

**Consular Corps** The *Laws of 1972*, Chapter 15, authorized special plates for “members of the consular or diplomatic corps of a foreign country who are certified by the United States Department of State.” This implies that a second type of plate, i.e., a “Diplomatic Corps” plate, *might* also have been issued, though none are known to exist today. If the vehicle was sold or the owner ceased to qualify, the plate had to be returned to the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles. Essentially diplomatic plates similar to those issued to foreign embassy personnel stationed in Washington D.C., they are known to exist only for a few years in the 1970s, and for only a few countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Nicaragua, Norway and Spain.

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/ConsularCorps.htm>



**Cumbres & Toltec Railroad** Built in 1880 and formerly part of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad, a great deal of the company's narrow gauge track was officially abandoned by the D&RGW in 1969. In 1970, the states of Colorado and New Mexico jointly purchased the 64-mile portion of the line from Chama, New Mexico to Antonito, Colorado, along with most of the steam locomotives, rolling stock and other equipment that had operated on the railway. This line was then renamed the Cumbres & Toltec. A private company, under contract to the states of New Mexico and Colorado, operates the line as a scenic railroad for tourists.

The license plate serial number consists of a stacked CT prefix followed by a 5-digit serial. A graphic of a steam locomotive and its tender appear at the bottom. The Cumbres & Toltec Railway plate is available to any motor vehicle owner for a fee of \$40.00 upon initial application and \$40.00 with each renewal (in addition to regular registration fees). Of the special fee collected, \$25.00 is distributed to the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad Commission. Application for the plate is made on form MVD11309. [Laws of 2007, Ch. 136, § 1]

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/CumbresAndToltecRailroad.htm>

**Emergency Medical Technician** This special plate for emergency medical technicians (EMTs) is available to any EMT who provides proof that he or she is an emergency medical technician licensed in New Mexico. There is a \$27.00 special plate fee in addition to regular registration fees at the time of initial registration, but no extra fee beyond normal registration costs when renewed. If a person holding an EMT plate ceases to be an emergency medical technician, he or she must immediately remove the plate from the vehicle and return it to the MVD, at which time it will be exchanged for a regular registration plate. The EMT plate has a 4-digit serial followed by a stacked EMT suffix. EMTs can apply for this plate using Form MVD11248. [Laws of 2005, Ch. 344, § 1]

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/FirefighterAndEMT.htm>

**Farm and Ranch** Commemorates New Mexico's farm and ranch community, and by extension, the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum in Las Cruces. The serial format is four digits followed by a stacked FR. The graphic background consists of a picture of a windmill against sunset colors. In addition to regular registration fees, there is an extra charge of \$37.00 initially, and upon each renewal. Twenty-five dollars of the additional fee goes to the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum for educational programs. Any motor vehicle (except motorcycle) owner may apply for this plate on form MVD10106. [Laws of 2009, Ch. 90, § 1]

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/FarmAndRanchHeritage.htm>

**Firefighter** Any New Mexico firefighter can apply for this plate by submitting proof that he or she is currently employed in that capacity, along with submission of a signed consent form from the fire chief. When a person holding a Firefighter plate ceases to be employed as a firefighter, the

person must immediately remove the plate from the vehicle and return it to the MVD, which will exchange it for a regular registration plate. A firefighter who holds a Firefighter plate and retires may retain the plate, however. The standard yellow New Mexico yucca base plate is used, but with the addition of a red firefighter emblem on the left and the word "FIREFIGHTER" at the bottom. The serial has a stacked FF prefix and a 4-digit number. Regular registration fees are collected along with an additional \$27.00 special plate fee at the time of initial registration only. \$15.00 of the \$27.00 fee is deposited in the Firefighters' Survivors Fund. Application is made on form MVD11316. [*Laws of 1998*, Ch. 21, § 1; *Laws of 2000*, Ch. 70, § 1; *Laws of 2007*, Ch. 154, § 1]

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/FirefighterAndEMT.htm>

**Fraternal Order of Police** The "FOP" plate is available to any New Mexico member of the Fraternal Order of Police. When a person holding one of these plates ceases to be a New Mexico member of the Fraternal Order of Police, he or she must immediately remove the plate from the vehicle and return it to the MVD in exchange for a regular registration plate. The FOP plate uses a standard current-version red-on-yellow yucca base plate with the FOP emblem added to the left side. The serial consists of four numeric digits followed by a stacked FOP. It is likely that alpha characters will be substituted for one or more of the numeric digits if and when the serial reaches 9999. In addition to regular registration fees, there is an additional fee of \$27.00 upon initial registration, but the additional fee is apparently not collected for later renewals. Form MVD11303 is used to apply for this plate. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 177, § 2]

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/FraternalOrderOfPolice.htm>

**Horseless Carriage** It is believed that there have been at least seven different styles and varieties of the Horseless Carriage plates, which were first made available in 1963 and were for cars at least 35 years old. The 1963 enabling law specifically stated that the plates were to be undated and were to be good for five years. Initially, antique trucks were not eligible for the plate. [*Laws of 1963*, Chapter 51; *Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 13, 1963, p.1, c.5; and *Santa Fe New Mexican*, July 18, 1963, p.28, c.5; Trucks were later made eligible by *Laws of 1973*, Chapter 5.] At that time the 35 year age stipulation made perfect sense for this classification, as a vehicle in 1963 would have had to have been a 1928 model or earlier to qualify. Oddly, the requirement has never been updated, which means that today you can get a Horseless Carriage plate for a 1985 muscle car. An additional current qualifying requirement is that the vehicle be used solely for exhibition and educational purposes. Upon transfer of ownership of a horseless carriage, the registration plate remains with the vehicle. A horseless carriage plate has to be renewed only once every five years.

All varieties of this plate have carried the words "HORSELESS CARRIAGE," and the earliest ones were silk screened with a reflective background on a flat aluminum plate. These had a simple 1-, 2-, or 3-digit numeric serial number. The current version is available to both cars and trucks, and is on the standard

embossed red-on-yellow yucca base plate. “HORSELESS CARRIAGE” is imprinted below the serial, which itself consists of four numeric digits followed by the Zia and the letters HC. It is likely that one or more alpha characters will be substituted for the numerals when the current serial exceeds 9999. A motorcycle version of the plate is also available. There is a \$17.50 initial fee, then a \$7.50 renewal fee every five years. These fees apply regardless of the type or size of the vehicle. Application is made on form MVD10056. [Current procedures are governed by *Laws of 1978*, Ch. 35, § 47]

**NOTE:** In about 2010 a new policy was adopted which now requires that a vehicle newly registered as a Horseless Carriage must be re-titled, with the new title bearing that explicit designation. If the owner later decides to convert the vehicle back to regular use, it must then be re-titled again. It is unknown if this policy is still in effect.

Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/HorselessCarriage.htm>

**Las Cruces** The plate promotes the city of Las Cruces and is available only to motor vehicle owners who are residents of that town. This is a graphic plate with a background of varying shades of yellow. At the top are the words “Las Cruces \* New Mexico,” where the “\*” is not the Zia but the city’s official emblem which consists of three crosses within a circle. Across the bottom is a silhouette of the nearby Organ Mountains, on which is imprinted the slogan “CITY OF THE CROSSES.”

The name “Las Cruces” means “The Crosses” in English, and is derived from the fact that the town was founded at the site of a small burial ground where crosses had been erected. The serial number consists of four embossed black numerals followed by a stacked LC. It is likely that alpha characters will be used to replace one or more of the numerals once the serial exceeds 9999. Beyond the regular registration fees there is an additional fee of \$37.00 collected both upon initial registration and at each annual renewal. Of the \$37.00, the amount of \$25.00 is appropriated to the city of Las Cruces Recreation Fund. The application form for this plate is MVD10099. [*Laws of 2008*, Ch. 85, § 1] Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/LasCruces.htm>

**N.M. Ranger** The New Mexico Rangers are a police auxiliary organization with responsibilities similar to those of the N.M. Mounted Patrol. In December 1941, a few days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, a volunteer civil defense organization was established under the name Bernalillo County Home Defense Unit. [*Albuquerque Journal*, December 16, 1941, p.4, c.5] The group initially operated only in and around Bernalillo County, a fact which gave rise to its name. In February 1946 the members reorganized for peacetime duties as the Bernalillo County Citizens Unit (BCCU) [*Albuquerque Journal*, February 28, 1946, p.3, c.1], ultimately assuming duties as a police auxiliary. Special license plates for the BCCU were authorized by the *Laws of 1967*, Chapter 264. The 1967 plates were maroon on reflective blue (similar to Official plates of the era) with an embossed “67” and had the organization’s initials, BCCU, stenciled in maroon

at the top. The plate number consisted of the prefix “AP” (for Auxiliary Police) followed by the Zia and a numeric serial. By the spring of 1968 the organization had expanded its operations to include the entire state, with the result that in May of that year its name was changed to New Mexico Rangers. [Albuquerque Journal, May 26, 1968, p.8, c.2] Plates issued after that date in 1968 reflected this change. The AP prefix was retained, but now stenciled at the top was the legend “N.M. RANGER,” employing a blue-on-reflective-tan non-passenger base with an embossed “68.” (The 1968 plates as first issued carried forward the block letters “BCCU” from 1967 at the top. Later in the year the new name was silk screened onto a strip of the same self-adhesive tan Scotchlite material that was already on the plates, and then this strip was used to cover the “BCCU.”) Tags for 1969 were switched to red on yellow and the prefix was changed to the more familiar “NMR” seen on these plates through the 1970s and later. Special plates remained available to the Rangers, with minor design element changes through the years. [Laws of 1993, Ch. 180, § 8. The same law governs current New Mexico Mounted Patrol plates. **Note: The N.M. Rangers who received these plates are different from the organization of the same name which operated around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.**] Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/NMRangerandBCCU.htm>

**Organ Donation** The Organ Donation Awareness plate is designed to promote awareness of the urgent need for organ and tissue donation in New Mexico. The plate is a standard red-on-yellow yucca base with a square “DONATE LIFE” emblem on the left. The serial consists of four digits followed by a stacked LFE (for “Life”). As in the case of other similar special plates, once the serial exceeds 9999, one or more of those digits will probably be changed to alpha characters. In addition to regular registration fees there is a one-time \$12.00 fee upon initial registration. Application is made on form MVD10666. [Laws of 2005, Ch. 112, § 1] Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/OrganDonation.htm>

**Patriot** As the MVD puts it, “the Patriot registration plate is available to any motor vehicle owner who is a patriot. No proof of patriotism is required.” The plate is more commonly called the “Support our Troops” plate because of the inscription thereon. The design is a rather busy graphic background with both the U.S. and the New Mexico flags, and the words “SUPPORT OUR TROOPS” imprinted below the serial number. The serial itself has five numeric digits followed by a stacked “US.” If demand for this plate ever exceeds 99999, one or more of the numeric digits will probably be converted to alpha characters. Regular registration fees are paid, plus a one-time initial special plate fee of \$27.00. Of that amount, \$8.00 is transferred to the Armed Forces Veterans License Fund, for the purpose of expanding services to rural areas of the state, including Native American communities and senior citizen centers. The Patriot plate is also available for motorcycles, with a similar but shorter numbering scheme. Apply for the plate using form MVD11300. [Laws of 2006, Ch. 76, § 1] Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/SupportOurTroops.htm>

**Pollinator Protection** Released in March 2020, this plate promotes protection of bees and other pollinators beneficial to the pollination of flowers and food crops. Application must be made by mail on form MVD11203. At least initially, online application is not available. Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/ProtectPollinators.htm>

**Retired Firefighter** The Retired Firefighter special plate is available to any person who is a retired New Mexico firefighter with proof that the person has retired from active employment as a firefighter. To date these plates have been on the standard red-on-yellow yucca base, but with a red firefighter emblem added on the left and a stacked RF to the right of a 4-digit numeric serial. There is a fee of \$27.00 upon initial registration in addition to regular registration charges. Application is made on form MVD11316. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 181, § 2]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/FirefighterAndEMT.htm>

**Retired State Police** Officially called “State Police Retired,” this plate is available to any person who is a retired New Mexico State Police officer, who must submit a copy of his/her retirement commission from the New Mexico State Police along with the application. The design uses the red-on-yellow yucca base with a picture of the NMSP shoulder patch on the left side. The serial is four numeric digits followed by a stacked SPR (for State Police Retired). There is a fee of \$27.00 upon initial registration in addition to regular registration charges. Application form MVD11243 is used to apply for this plate. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 174, § 2; *Laws of 2003*, Ch. 211, § 2] Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/StatePoliceMotorcycleAndPassenger.htm#RSP>

**Route 66** The owner of any vehicle (excepting motorcycles) may apply for issuance of the Route 66 commemorative plate. The design uses the red-on-yellow yucca base, with a picture on the left side of a U.S. 66 highway number sign bearing the New Mexico designation. The serial number is four numeric digits followed by a stacked RT. If and when requests for this plate reach 9999, one or more of the numeric digits will probably be replaced by alpha characters. There is a special plate fee of \$37.00 initially and upon each annual renewal. Of that additional fee, \$25.00 is distributed to the Department of Transportation to fund the revitalization and preservation of historic Route 66 in New Mexico pursuant to the national scenic byways program. Form MVD11259 is used to apply for the plate. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 180, § 2]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/Route66.htm>

**Santa Fe 400th Anniversary** Commemorates the 400th anniversary of the founding of the city of Santa Fe in 1610. The plate uses a graphic background in varying shades of white and tan. The serial number is five digits followed by a stacked SF. Across the top of the plate is the URL for the official Santa Fe 400th anniversary website. This is one of just a handful of New Mexico plates which display a URL. (This particular URL appears to have subsequently been hijacked by someone hawking a weight-loss diet.) In addition to regular registration fees, a special plate fee of \$37.00 was collected for initial issuance of the plate, as well as at the time of each registration renewal made or before June 30, 2012. On and after July 1, 2012 the special fee was no longer collected. Twenty-five dollars of each \$37.00 fee collected was distributed to the City of Santa Fe for use in the commemoration activities.  
**Important Note:** This was a limited run plate, which is no longer issued. [*Laws of 2009*, Ch. 120, § 1] Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/SantaFe.htm>



**Spay Neuter** The “Spay-Neuter” pet care special registration plate is available to any owner of a motor vehicle, excepting motorcycles. The base design uses the red-on-yellow yucca plate. On the left side is the outline of the state of New Mexico, with a paw print inside of it. The serial number contains four digits followed by a stacked SN. In addition to regular registration fees, an additional fee of \$37.00 is paid at the time of the first registration, and upon each regular registration renewal. When these plates first became available the expectation was that a portion of the fee would be returned to the county of issue to be used for spay-neuter and other animal welfare purposes, but it is unclear whether this policy was ever implemented. Current law says that \$25.00 of the fee collected for each pet care special registration plate shall be paid to the state treasurer for credit to the animal care and facility fund. Application is made on form MVD11249. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 175, § 2; *Laws of 2009*, Ch. 192, § 1]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/SpayNeuter.htm>

**Volunteer Firefighter** Any person who is an active volunteer firefighter with a volunteer fire department recognized by the State Fire Marshal may apply for this plate. The person must submit proof that he or she is currently an active member of a recognized volunteer fire department, and must include a consent form signed by the fire chief. When a person holding a Volunteer Firefighter plate ceases to serve as an active volunteer firefighter, the person must immediately remove the plate from the vehicle and return it to the MVD, which will exchange it for a regular registration plate. The design uses a plain white base with a red and yellow firefighter emblem on the left side. There is a 4-digit numerical serial followed by a stacked VF. The stacked words “VOLUNTEER” and “FIREFIGHTER” are imprinted below the serial. Regular registration fees are collected along with an additional \$27.00 special plate fee at the time of initial registration only. \$15.00 of the \$27.00 fee is deposited in the Firefighters’ Survivors Fund. Application is made on form MVD11316. [*Laws of 1998*, Ch. 21, § 1; *Laws of 2000*, Ch. 70, § 1; *Laws of 2007*, Ch. 154, § 1]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/FirefighterAndEMT.htm>

**Wildlife** The “share with wildlife” plate features artwork of New Mexico wildlife and is available for any private motor vehicle except motorcycles. The plate was originally issued on the red-on-yellow yucca base with a picture of a Gambel’s quail on the left side, subsequently replaced by a mule deer. The latest version is on a turquoise base with a picture of the Rio Grande cutthroat trout. The serial number contains four digits and a stacked WL suffix (prefix on the mule deer version). In addition to regular registration costs, there is an additional fee of \$27.00 initially and \$12.00 upon each regular renewal. \$15.00 of the initial surcharge fee and the entire renewal surcharge fee collected is distributed to the Share with Wildlife Program of the Game Protection Fund. Application is made on form MVD10092. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 178 § 2; *Laws of 2004*, Ch. 59, § 9]  
Website Photos: <https://NMplates.com/Wildlife.htm>

# Collegiate Plates

Any state-supported higher educational institution in New Mexico may request that the Motor Vehicle Division issue a special collegiate registration plate for that institution. The plate's color and design are determined by the MVD in consultation with the institution. Any person may apply for a plate for any one of these institutions. He or she does not have to be a student, faculty member, or an alumnus of the college. In addition to regular registration fees, there is a special plate fee of \$37.00 initially and upon each renewal. Of that amount, \$25.00 is distributed to the higher educational institution for which the registration plate is issued. Form MVD11322 is used for application for all collegiate plates. [Collegiate plates are authorized by the *Laws of 1989*, Ch. 360, § 1] All collegiate plates, as well as the Dealer Coach plate, are shown here: <https://NMplates.com/Collegiate.htm>

Collegiate plates are currently available for the following institutions, with more being added periodically:

**Eastern New Mexico University** Opened originally in 1934 as Eastern New Mexico Junior College (ENMJC) in the town of Portales, the name was changed to Eastern New Mexico College (ENMC) in 1940 upon becoming a four-year college. When graduate studies were added in 1949, the current name of Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU) was adopted. Among other areas, ENMU provides courses of study in business, education, arts and sciences. The plate uses a mostly-green graphic background with a picture of a greyhound (the school's mascot) at the bottom. The serial number has four digits in white and a stacked ENMU in the same color at right.

**New Mexico Highlands University** Established in the town of Las Vegas, New Mexico in 1893 as New Mexico Normal School, a school for prospective teachers. The institution became New Mexico Normal University in 1902, and then New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) in 1941. The curriculum is now much broader than the original focus of teacher education. The graphic background is purple and white. The serial number has a staggered and stacked HU followed by five numeric digits, all in white.

**New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (N.M. Tech)** The school was founded 1889 in the town of Socorro as the New Mexico School of Mines, and the current official name was adopted in 1951. It is commonly referred to by its nickname of New Mexico Tech. Aside from its original specialization in geology and mining, the institution has expanded its curriculum to cover such varied subjects as petroleum engineering and atmospheric studies, among others. One of two plate designs shows a mountain rising above a green field. The serial number is red and consists of the letters NMT (horizontally) followed by four numeric digits.

**New Mexico Military Institute** NMMI is a classic military prep boarding school, consisting of a four-year high school and a two-year junior college. Ninety-five percent of the graduating cadets go on to four-year universities. The school's two-year Army ROTC Early Commissioning Program commissions an average of 40 cadets each year as U.S. Army 2nd lieutenants. About one hundred cadets every year are accepted to attend one of the five major U.S. Service academies (Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine). The school is located in Roswell, New Mexico. The plate is red on yellow, but is not a copy of New Mexico's standard yellow license plates. The school's military emblem appears at left. The 4-digit numeric serial is followed by the stacked letters MI (for Military Institute).

**New Mexico State University** A land grant college, NMSU was founded as an agricultural school in 1888 under the name Las Cruces College. The following year the name was changed to New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. It became New Mexico State University in 1960, and though it continues to be best known for its agriculture and engineering programs, courses of study are available in a great many other fields. For decades the U.S. Post Office recognized the institution as a "town" with the name "State College." The name was later changed to University Park, but now the Post Office there is considered to be a branch of the Las Cruces Post Office.

The NMSU plate is known in at least two styles, the earlier of which had a white, yellow and red background a picture of the school's mascot ("Pistol Pete") at the left side, above which was imprinted "NMSU AGGIES" in a stacked arrangement. The serial number contained only numeric digits, with no suffix or prefix. A later version of the plate has a white and purple background with the outline of the state of New Mexico on the left side. Imprinted inside of the outline is the inscription "NM State." The serial number is four digits followed by a stacked SU (for State University).

**Northern New Mexico College** NNMC has roots with the Spanish-American Normal School at El Rito (opened in 1909). Originally established to train teachers who would be providing instruction to Spanish speaking students, the present name was adopted in 2005. Its main campus is in Española, with a branch in El Rito. The design uses a white background, the name of the school in orange at the bottom, a picture of an eagle (the school's mascot) at left and a 4-digit serial in black.



**University of New Mexico** Founded in 1889 and centrally located in the city of Albuquerque, UNM has grown to be the largest institution of higher learning in the state. The school offers bachelor's, master's, doctoral and professional degree programs in a more fields than any other school in the state. The UNM plate has been issued in at least three varieties. The first two had a white background with a stylized grey image of the school's mascot, the lobo (wolf), but with different serial number arrangements. The serial number included the letters UNM as a prefix or embedded within the numeric part of the serial. The latest version of the plate has a grey background with UNM in red at the bottom. A smaller image of the lobo appears at left. There is a 5-digit serial in black with no prefix or suffix.

**Western New Mexico University** WNMU was founded in the relatively rural mining town of Silver City in 1893. Primarily a teacher's college in its early days, the school now offers baccalaureate and master's degrees in numerous fields, including forest and wildlife management, zoology, accounting, business, chemistry, criminal justice, nursing and others. The graphic base is purple, white and gold. A picture of a portion of one of the school's buildings appears at the left. The serial number has four black digits followed by a stacked WNMU in purple.

**Dealer Coach** The Dealer Coach tag is actually a regular-issue plate, but because it is tied exclusively to the collegiate world, we have elected to include it in the Collegiate section.

Aside from their salaries, university athletic coaches are often given other amenities by the university and/or businesses. One common such perquisite is the free use of automobiles. In such cases in New Mexico the dealership retains the car in its inventory as an unsold vehicle, and it therefore remains untitled. It is essentially treated the same as any other unsold vehicle on the lot that has a regular dealer plate hung on it when taken out for a demonstration drive, but in this case a "Dealer Coach" plate is individually registered to each such vehicle. Whether or not the university reimburses the dealership for the use of the car is a matter entirely between those two entities, but the dealership must report to the IRS the value of the use of the vehicle as income to the coach. When finally returned to the dealership the vehicles are sold as used cars, but are often hyped as "special program cars." The law provides that the special plates are available for such arrangements made with "a full-time coach or athletic director at any state-supported four-year institution of higher education in New Mexico." [*Laws of 2007*, Ch. 319, § 29] The Dealer Coach is on the standard yellow (yucca) base with the serial consisting of four numeric digits followed by the letters "DC" (horizontally). The words "Dealer Coach" are embossed beneath the serial.

All collegiate plates, as well as the Dealer Coach plate, are shown here:  
<https://NMplates.com/Collegiate.htm>

## Judicial Plates

In the 1980s and 1990s a number of different types of yellow-on-red judicial plates were manufactured. Note that we do *not* say that these plates were “issued,” because there is reason to doubt that many, if any of them were actually used by the persons occupying the positions named on the respective license plates. Since at least the 1970s, for fear of retaliation by convicted criminals, most of these persons have been loathe to be identified in public. The following plates are known to have been made:

**Chief Judge** Embossed “CHIEF JUDGE,” and with plate serial beginning with CJDG.

**Chief Justice** Embossed “CHIEF JUSTICE,” and with plate serial beginning with CJ.

**Court of Appeals Judge** Embossed “COURT OF APPEALS JUDGE,” and with plate serial beginning with CAJ.

**District Attorney** Embossed “DISTRICT ATTORNEY,” and with plate serial beginning with DA. A portion of the numeric part of the serial identifies the Judicial District for which the person is the DA.

**District Judge** Embossed “DISTRICT JUDGE” or “DISTRICT COURT JUDGE,” depending on the style and the date of manufacture, and with plate serial beginning with DJ. Said to exist as a similar, but red-on-yellow, plate from the late 1970s.

**Supreme Court Justice** Embossed “SUPREME COURT JUSTICE,” and with plate serial beginning with SCJ.

Website photos for all of the aforementioned judicial plates can be seen here:

<https://NMplates.com/Judicial.htm>

## Political Plates

Early political plates are described and illustrated with a considerable amount of detail in the chapter on “Governor” plates. Although the early holders of these plates actually used them on their cars, many present day office holders are disinclined to be identified in public for fear of being accosted (possibly violently) by persons not happy with the fact that American democracy works in the favor of the majority rather than in favor of their own personal views.

The plates listed below are in many cases continuations of the same types whose issuance began in 1953, but especially since the 1980s have been in entirely different (and changing) formats. A common thread for these later plates is that most of these have been made in a yellow-on-red color scheme, some embellished with the Great Seal of the State of New Mexico. The political position for which each plate is intended is in every case spelled out in plain English on the plate, although some of the lengthier titles contain some abbreviations. Many of the yellow-on-red political plates were apparently made in multiple copies and amount to little more than “political samples,” possibly passed out as souvenirs by the politicians themselves. As of 1978 these plates were being issued annually with embossed dates. [1978 *New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director] The serial number, or a portion of it, on most of these plates indicates the district which the representative or senator represents. The types of plates likely to be encountered include the following:

**House Majority Floor Leader**  
**House Minority Floor Leader**  
**House Minority Whip**  
**House Sergeant at Arms**  
**Senate President Pro Tem**  
**Senate Chief Clerk**  
**Senate Majority Leader**  
**Senate Minority Leader**

**Senate Minority Whip**  
**Sergeant at Arms**  
**Speaker of the House**  
**State Representative**  
**State Senator**  
**United States Representative**  
**United States Senator**

**Note:** It is known that at least some political plates were issued in pairs, but whether this was done for all types and/or all years has not been established.

Because of their similar appearance, both to each other and over a period of years, only a few of these types of plates are illustrated in the photo pages of this chapter (aside from samples). The majority of the same types—in their earlier incarnations—will be found illustrated in the chapter on “Governor” plates, however, and all of them are illustrated on our website at the links given below.

Website photos for the political plates listed above are at:

<https://NMplates.com/StateRepresentative.htm>

<https://NMplates.com/StateSenator.htm>

<https://NMplates.com/USSenatorAndUSRepresentative.htm>

## State Officers and other State Plates

All website photos for this section can be seen at:

<https://NMplates.com/StateOfficersAndOtherStatePlates.htm>

**Attorney General** Known to exist from at least as early as 1972 in a red-on-white color scheme. Those from the 1980s and later are in the ubiquitous yellow-on-red style of political and judicial plates of the period. While the earlier ones may have actually been used by the state's Attorney General, it is doubtful that the later ones are anything more than samples or souvenirs. All of the known types are either silk screened or embossed "ATTY GENERAL" or "ATTORNEY GENERAL" and have a one-digit serial, usually "6."

**Commissioner of Public Lands** The Commissioner of Public Lands is the head of the State Land Office, whose mission is to generate revenue from state lands through oil and gas leases and other activities. The funds go into the state coffers and are used for a wide range of state expenditures. These license plates are known to have existed for a few years in the 1970s, but for no other period. That does not mean that they don't exist for other years, as at most only one such plate would have been issued each year, and those few plates may still be in the possession of former Commissioners or their families. The existing examples are red on yellow (earlier) and yellow on red (later). Both types bear the words "COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS" or an abbreviation thereof, and a single digit serial, normally "7."

**Corporation Commissioner** The State Corporation Commission (SCC) and the State Utility Commission (SUC) were former state entities which oversaw the licensing and regulatory control of various corporations within the state, including insurance companies, public utilities, and intra- and interstate carriers of passengers and cargo, among many others. A Corporation Commissioner was an elected official who was a member of the SCC. In 1999 the Public Regulation Commission (PRC) was created to replace both the SCC and the SUC. [*New Mexico Blue Book 2007-2008*, p. 151]

Corporation Commissioner plates, therefore, can exist only for years prior to 1999, and in fact only a few examples from the early '70s through the mid-'90s are known. The earliest ones are red on white with the words "CORP. COMMISSIONER" silk screened, along with a 1- or 2-digit embossed serial, usually "8," "9," or "10," distinguishing the individual commissioners. Later plates are yellow on red with "CORPORATION COMM." in embossed letters. On these, the serial number has two digits separated by the Zia, with one of the digits indicating the district which the Commissioner represents.

**Driver Education** Mandated in 1961 and issued at least as far back as 1964, they were in the maroon-on-reflective-blue colors of other official plates of the time. The plates have a prefix of DE, followed by the Zia and a numeric serial number, and were used on both state- and dealer-owned cars employed in driver education courses. [*Laws of 1961*, Chapter 51; Press release, “Vehicles Subject to New Mexico Registration,” Benny E. Sanchez, Motor Vehicle Commissioner, July 31, 1964]

**Motor Transportation Police** The primary responsibility of the MTP, a division of the N. M. Department of Public Safety, is the enforcement of state and federal regulations and laws which apply to commercial vehicles. But it also has statewide law enforcement jurisdiction, similar to that of the State Police. The plates on its vehicles are a unique black on silver and are issued in pairs. MTP motorcycle plates exist as well, but in very small numbers.

**Real Estate Commissioner** These plates exist from the 1980s and 1990s in red-on-yellow base plates similar to passenger plates of the same periods. The earlier plates, on the plain yellow background, have a prefix of NM and a 4-digit serial from 0001 to 0005 to distinguish the individual commissioners, while the later ones on the yellow yucca base have a prefix of REC and a two-part numeric serial, one part of which represents the district which the commissioner represents. Both styles have the words “REAL ESTATE COMMISSIONER” on the plate, with the earlier ones silk screened and the later ones embossed. Additional, even later, styles may also exist, but have not been seen.

A real estate commissioner is a member of the New Mexico Real Estate Board, which was created by state law in 1959 and charged with enforcing the Real Estate License Law and the Real Estate Commission Rules. The purpose of the New Mexico Real Estate Commission is to protect the public and enhance the professional competence of real estate brokers. It consists of five members appointed by the Governor. Four of the members are licensed New Mexico real estate brokers and one is a non-broker public member appointed to bring a consumer perspective to the Commission. It is not known how many of these were issued for actual use or how many might have been only souvenirs. In any case, with a maximum of only five plates issued, and with these plates renewed with stickers until a given commissioner was replaced, there would not have been many Real Estate Commissioner plates issued over the years.

**Secretary of State** Known from as early as 1946, very few examples have actually surfaced over the years. The type is illustrated in a 1978 DMV publication as being yellow on red, with the words “SECRETARY OF STATE” at left, followed by the Zia and a single digit serial, always “3.” [*1978 New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director]

**State Auditor** Plates for this position are known to exist from the 1970s in red on yellow and from the 1980s in yellow on red. Both styles bear the words “STATE AUDITOR.” The known examples have a single numeric digit of “4” as a serial number. The Office of the New Mexico State Auditor was established by the New Mexico State Constitution, and the State

Auditor is an elected official. The primary purpose of the agency is to ensure that the financial affairs of every agency are thoroughly examined and audited each year.

**State Board of Education** These plates are known from the late 1990s and early 2000s in the yellow-on-red colors used on many other special plates for state officials during that time. The words “STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION” are silk screened on the plate, which also contains an embossed Zia and a single-digit serial number. (An example known from the 1990s has a serial of “8.”) The plates were made available to what was then called the New Mexico State Board of Education, but is now called the New Mexico Public Education Department. The department provides direction and oversight at the state level for public education in the state.

**State Transportation Pool** Produced in an unusual white-on-reflective-red color scheme, these tags are undated, bear an embossed “OF” prefix and serial, and have the words “N.M. STATE TRANS. POOL” silk screened on the bottom portion of the plate. Transportation Pool vehicles can be assigned to state agencies for varying periods of time without the agency itself having to purchase a vehicle. The agency pays for the use of the vehicle, in effect leasing it from the Transportation Pool. At times also called the State Motor Pool, this department is now part of the Transportation Services Division of the General Services Department, and the vehicles today carry the same generic State Government license plates as do most other state-owned vehicles. The dies used in making the known examples of this plate are pre-1977, but a 1975 DMV publication indicates that motor pool vehicles during the mid-1970s used the standard maroon-on-blue “OF” Official plates, without any other special designation on them. [*Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975] This implies that the plates *may* have been made in 1976, but even if so it is still possible that they could have been in service into the 1980s. Although the NMSTP tags fall within the category of Official plates, they differ from virtually all other Officials in that the separator between the “OF” and the serial is a hyphen rather than the Zia.

**State Treasurer** These plates are known from the 1970s and 1980s in red-on-yellow and yellow-on-red color schemes, respectively, all bearing the words “STATE TREASURER” and a single-digit serial number, which is usually “5.” The State Treasurer is an elected official whose office has the following responsibilities among others: (1) Serve as the state’s banker and invest the state’s short-term funds to provide maximum yield with maximum safety and liquidity. (2) Provide banking assistance and services to state agencies. (3) Reconcile the state’s bank accounts. (4) Act as paying agent on the state’s outstanding debt and bond issues.

All website photos for the section above can be seen at:  
<https://NMplates.com/StateOfficersAndOtherStatePlates.htm>

## Veteran and Veteran-Related Plates

**Armed Forces Veteran** When armed forces veteran plates first became available in the 1980s there was but a single generic plate, irrespective of branch of service or conditions of that service. The plates evolved over the years until at present there is a standardized yellow-on-blue base plate imprinted with the words “Armed Forces Veteran.” Additionally, the plate’s serial number has an alpha suffix which identifies the branch of service in which the person served. These are:

<b>AF</b>	Air Force
<b>AR</b>	Army
<b>CG</b>	Coast Guard
<b>MC</b>	Marine Corps
<b>N</b>	Navy
<b>WV</b>	Woman Veteran (not a separate branch; see details below)

**Woman Veteran** A special version of the Armed Service Veteran plate is available to women veterans of the armed forces of the United States, upon submission of satisfactory proof to the MVD. The general appearance of the plate is similar to the other veteran plates, but is imprinted with the words “Proudly She Served.” In place of the usual service designation suffix of AF, AR, MC, N, or CG, is the special suffix of WV. Application is made on the same MVD10353 form as are other Armed Forces Veteran plates, and fees are also the same.

Note: The earlier generic style of yellow-on-blue Armed Forces Veteran plates—i.e., without the branch-of-service suffix—continued to be available for some time after the later suffixed variety came into use. Whether the state plans to have these available indefinitely, or only until existing supplies are exhausted is unknown.

Armed Forces Veteran plates in general are available to any individual who is a veteran of the armed forces of the United States or is retired from the National Guard or military reserves. The applicant must provide proof satisfactory to the Motor Vehicle Division of honorable discharge from the armed forces or of retirement from the National Guard or military reserves. This is usually accomplished by providing a photocopy of the person’s DD214, a form issued to every service member upon discharge from active duty.

The veteran may also elect to receive an optional “veteran-designation” sticker (officially called a “decal”) to be placed across the top of the plate, in the sticker box provided for that purpose. The applicant must provide supporting documentation, or the sticker will not be issued. Available stickers are listed and described below:

**Afghanistan** Any veteran who has served in the Afghanistan war, from its beginning in 2001 to the present time, may request this sticker.

**Air Force** This is essentially a generic sticker for Air Force veterans to optionally place on the standard AF-suffix Armed Forces Veteran plate if none of the other available stickers apply, or they elect not to use one of the other ones.

**Air Force Cross** Available to any recipient of the Air Force Cross, the second highest military award that can be given to a member of the United States Air Force.

**Army** This is a generic sticker for Army veterans to optionally affix to the standard AR-suffix Armed Forces Veteran plate if none of the other available stickers apply, or they elect not to use one of the other ones.

**Atomic Veteran** During the 1940s through the 1960s the U.S. and several other countries carried out numerous above-ground atomic weapons tests. Many of these tests exposed U.S. servicemen to radioactive fallout, which at the time was thought to be harmless but later proved otherwise. This sticker is available to veterans who were participants in any of the tests.

**Bataan Survivor** The 200th Coast Artillery, a unit of the New Mexico National Guard, was deployed to Luzon Island in the Philippines in September 1941 and came under attack from vastly superior Japanese forces a little over two months later. By late December American and Filipino forces regrouped on the Bataan Peninsula. With the American mainland some 8,000 miles distant, reinforcement and resupply to the Philippines was impossible and American and Philippine forces on Bataan surrendered to the Japanese in April 1942.

As POW's they were forced to march 65 miles without food or water to prison camps farther inland. In total, some 1,000 Americans and 9,000 Filipinos were murdered by the Japanese during this infamous Bataan Death March. A very large proportion of the American forces in the Death March were New Mexicans, and survivors of the Bataan campaign are eligible for the Bataan Survivor sticker.

**Bronze Star** The Bronze Star is the fourth highest individual military award and is presented for "heroic or meritorious achievement or service." Recipients of this medal may request the Bronze Star veteran-designation sticker.



**Coast Guard** This is essentially a generic sticker for Coast Guard veterans to put on the standard CG-suffix Armed Forces Veteran plate if none of the other available stickers apply, or they elect not to use one of the other ones.

**Combat Wounded** Any veteran who was wounded in combat would have received the Purple Heart medal and would be more likely to request the Purple Heart license plate than the regular Veteran plate. Nonetheless, if a wounded veteran happens to request a standard Armed Forces Veteran plate, he or she may also request the Combat Wounded sticker.

**Desert Storm** A veteran who served in the 1990-1991 First Gulf War, officially known as Desert Storm, may apply for this designation sticker. Most combat action took place in Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

**Disabled Korea Veteran** A disabled veteran of the Korean War qualifies for this sticker, but in view of the fact that a Disabled Veteran license plate would be available absolutely free—with no registration fees, no special plate fee, and no renewal fees—he or she would be far more likely to choose the Disabled Veteran plate rather than an Armed Forces Veteran plate with a sticker on it, which would require paying all of those fees.

**Distinguished Flying Cross** The Distinguished Flying Cross is a military decoration (medal) which may be presented to an officer or enlisted member of the United States Armed Forces who distinguishes himself or herself in support of operations by “heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight.” A recipient of this medal may request the corresponding sticker for an Armed Forces Veteran license plate.

**Distinguished Service Cross** The Distinguished Service Cross is the second highest military award that can be given to a member of the United States Army and any veteran who has received this medal may request and display this sticker.

**Grenada** A former British colony, Grenada was a young (and very small) Caribbean island democracy when leftist factions seized power and suspended the constitution. After that government devolved into a morass of turmoil and violence, the Organization of American States (OAS) requested intervention to stabilize the nation. Partly because a large number of American students attending the medical school there were deemed to be at risk from the unrest, in October 1983 the U.S. led the invasion of Grenada which included troops from Jamaica and other

Caribbean nations, though much of the world was opposed to the action. Nonetheless, stability was restored and the U.S. withdrew after several months. Any of the 7,000 or so U.S. military personnel involved in the Grenada action who are New Mexico residents may apply for and display this sticker.

**Iraqi Freedom** Sometimes called the “Second Gulf War,” Iraqi Freedom was the operational name applied to the 2003-2011 invasion of Iraq by the U.S. and Western and Arab allies. Because of the many years spent in-country by U.S. forces, a large number of New Mexico military veterans qualify for and display this sticker on their Armed Forces Veteran license plates.

**Korea** Any veteran of the 1950-1953 Korean War is eligible for this sticker for placement on the Armed Forces Veteran plate.

**Marine Corps** This is a generic sticker for Marine Corps veterans to optionally place on the standard Armed Forces Veteran plate if none of the other available stickers apply, or they elect not to use one of the other ones.

**Medal of Honor** A veteran who was the recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor may request and display this sticker. However, in view of the fact that a Medal of Honor license plate would be available absolutely free—with no registration fees, no special plate fee, and no renewal fees—he or she would be far more likely to choose the Medal of Honor plate rather than an Armed Forces Veteran plate with a sticker on it, which would require paying all of those fees.

**Merchant Marine** At the time of this writing there is no Armed Forces Veteran plate available with a Merchant Marine suffix (e.g., MM). However, a Merchant Marine sticker was made available and has been seen in use on the older style generic yellow-on-blue Armed Forces Veteran license plates.

**Navajo Code Talker** During World War II the U.S. military recruited persons from several American Indian tribes who were fluent in both English and their own native languages to be tactical messengers in combat theaters. Their mission was to translate critical military communications from English to their own native language and transmit the messages verbally over telephone and radio-telephone circuits. Another messenger from the same tribe would receive the message at the other end and translate it back into English for the intended recipient. The vast majority of the recruits were from the Navajo reservation in New Mexico and Arizona. The advantages of this system were that (1) Navajo is an extremely complex

language which at that time was understood by no more than about twenty-five individuals outside of the Navajo people themselves (and even those few were all Americans), and (2) messages could be transmitted this way about thirty times faster than was possible with standard encryption and decryption methods. Most Navajo code talkers served in the Pacific during the war and their “code,” i.e., their language, was never broken. Few code talker veterans remain alive today, but those few are eligible for the Armed Forces Veteran license plate with the Navajo Code Talker sticker.

**Navy** This is a generic sticker which Navy veterans can place on the standard N-suffix Armed Forces Veteran plate if none of the other available stickers apply, or they elect not to use one of the other ones.

**Navy Cross** The Navy Cross is the second highest decoration for valor that may be awarded to a member of the United States Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard (the latter only when operating under the Department of the Navy). Any recipient of this medal may display this sticker.

**Panama** In 1989 Panama was under the control of a military dictator, General Manuel Noriega, who was known to be involved with international drug trafficking and money laundering. He in fact was under indictment in the U.S. because of that. Enraged by the indictments, the Panamanian General Assembly declared on December 15, 1989, that a state of war existed between Panama and the U.S.

The next day Panamanian Defense Forces shot and killed two U.S. military officers outside the U.S. military base at Ft. Clayton in the former Canal Zone, and kidnaped and tortured another officer and his wife who had witnessed the incident. These and other factors precipitated the U.S. military invasion of Panama on December 20. Noriega was deposed and arrested, and Panama was ultimately returned to a democratic government. Most U.S. forces withdrew early the following year. Those who served in this action may display the Panama sticker on their Armed Forces Veteran license plates.

**Pearl Harbor Survivor** Any military veteran who survived the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor may request and display this sticker. However, since an entirely separate and distinctive Pearl Harbor Survivor license plate is also available for this purpose, it is probable that most of those who are eligible request that special license plate instead.

**Silver Star** The Silver Star is the third highest military decoration that can be awarded to a person serving with the United States Armed Forces in action against an enemy of the United States. Any recipient of the Silver Star medal may display the corresponding sticker on a duly registered Armed Forces Veteran license plate.

**Vietnam** Any veteran of the Vietnam war may display this sticker. (U.S. involvement was roughly 1961-1973, but U.S. military advisors had been killed in action there as early as 1959.)

**World War I** Any veteran of World War I (U.S. involvement was 1917-1918) is eligible. However, even the youngest veterans of that conflict would have been around 90 years old when these stickers first became available, and it is doubtful that more than a handful were ever issued.

**World War II** Any veteran of World War II (U.S. involvement was 1941-1945) is eligible for this sticker.

Armed Forces Veteran plates are also available for motorcycles, but because of their small size the alpha suffix is not used, nor is there space for a veteran-designation decal. In other words, there is only one variety of veteran motorcycle plate, other than the disabled veteran motorcycle plate described elsewhere in this chapter. Interestingly, and unlike virtually all other special plates—veteran and otherwise—all military service special plates issued on the basis of Form MVD10353 can be obtained not only for passenger cars, light trucks and motorcycles, but also for RV's (including motor homes, travel trailers and truck campers).

In addition to regular registration fees, there is an initial fee of \$17.00 (\$9.00 for motorcycles), but then there is no further additional fee at the time of payment of regular renewal fees. Of the \$17.00 initial fee, \$8.00 of the amount paid for each non-motorcycle plate is transferred to the Armed Forces Veterans License Fund for the purpose of expanding services to rural areas of the state, including Native American communities and senior citizen centers. Application is made on form MVD10353.

## Other Special Veteran Plates

The website photos for all plates in this section will be found at:

<https://NMplates.com/Veteran.htm>

**Active Duty** Technically not a “veteran” plate, the Active Duty tag is available to any New Mexico service member who is currently on active duty. There is a one-time initial fee of \$27 in addition to the regular registration fees. Upon leaving active duty the plate must be replaced with a regular plate or a standard Veteran plate. Possibly because most New Mexico active duty personnel are likely to be stationed outside of the state, these plates are rarely seen. Application is made on form MVD11267.

**Disabled Veteran** The Disabled Veteran plate, officially called the “50 percent disabled veteran plate,” is available for up to two vehicles, including motorcycles, to a veteran upon the submission of proof satisfactory to the MVD that he or she was at least fifty percent disabled while serving in the armed forces of the United States. For this plate all fees are waived, including the regular registration fee, as well as renewal fees. Imprinted in the renewal sticker box is the word “Permanent.” Sometimes a sticker bearing the designation “PRM” (for “Permanent”) will be seen in the sticker box. The plate has been issued in at least three distinct varieties. One of these has a serial with a horizontal DV prefix, and the other omits the DV but includes the words “DISABLED VETERAN.” A third variety has both the words and the DV prefix. The motorcycle version has both, with the DV as stacked letters. The application form is MVD10353. A 50% disabled veteran who would also qualify for the disabled person (handicapped, or HP) plate may elect to have the disability wheelchair symbol included on his or her disabled veteran plate.

**Ex-Prisoner of War** The first Prisoner of War (POW) plate (#001) was issued on about July 1, 1978, to Virgil O. McCollum of Albuquerque who was a Bataan survivor. [*Rio Rancho Observer*, June 1, 1978, p.19, c.1; and *1978 New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director] There have been several subsequent versions of this type. The current version is similar in appearance to other veteran plates, but with the words “Ex-Prisoner of War” imprinted on the plate. The serial number of the current issue has a stacked POW prefix and four numeric digits. At present, the POW plate is available to any person, or to the surviving spouse of a deceased person, who was held as a prisoner of war by an enemy of the United States during any armed conflict, upon submission of proof satisfactory to the MVD. If the applicant is the surviving spouse, a copy of the marriage certificate and death certificate must accompany the application. For this plate all fees are waived, including the regular registration fee, as well as renewal fees.

Imprinted in the renewal sticker box is the word “Permanent.” Sometimes a sticker bearing the designation “PRM” (for “Permanent”) will be seen in the sticker box. The application form is MVD10353.

**Gold Star Family** The Gold Star Family plate is available to the surviving mother, father, step parent or spouse of a service member killed in an armed conflict with an enemy of the United States. This is a relatively recent addition to the family of veteran-related plates issued by New Mexico and it has an appearance very distinctive from all the rest. Red numerals and gold lettering appear on a white background. A gold star is enclosed in a red rectangle on the left side of the plate and the 4-digit serial number is suffixed with the stacked letters “GS.” There is a limit of four Gold Star Family registration plates for each eligible family. There is no fee for this plate other than regular registration fees. The registration fee itself is also waived for the first plate issued to the service member’s mother or spouse. Note that application is made on form MVD10100, which is different from the forms used for all other veteran plates. [*Laws of 2009*, Ch. 88, § 1]

**Medal of Honor** A distinctive Medal of Honor plate has been available since about 1978 for any person who has received the Congressional Medal of Honor and submits proof satisfactory to the MVD that he or she has been awarded that medal. [*1978 New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director] The current version is similar to the Armed Forces Veteran plates, but with the words “Medal of Honor” imprinted on the plate. The serial number incorporates the recipient’s initials. As one might imagine, this plate is exceptionally rare, with only about three of them having been issued over the past forty years or so. For this plate all fees are waived, including the regular registration fee, as well as renewal fees. Imprinted in the renewal sticker box is the word “Permanent.” Sometimes a sticker bearing the designation “PRM” (for “Permanent”) will be seen in the sticker box. The application form is MVD10353.

**National Guard** The National Guard plate has been issued in at least three varieties since the 1980s, as follows:

- 1980s: Yellow background with red numerals.
- 1990s: Blue background with yellow numerals.
- 2000s: White-yellow-red background with black numerals.

All of these bear the words “NATIONAL GUARD” and the image of a Minuteman. The yellow-on-blue variety has a stacked prefix of NG, and the white-yellow-red variety has a stacked suffix of NG.

At present the National Guard plate is available to any person who is an active member of the New Mexico National Guard upon the submission of

proof satisfactory to the MVD that the person is currently a member of the Guard. No fees, including regular registration fees or renewal fees, are collected for issuance of a National Guard plate. The word “Permanent” is imprinted in the renewal sticker box. Sometimes a sticker bearing the designation “PRM” (for “Permanent”) will be seen in the sticker box. Application is on form MVD10247, which is different from the forms used for all other military/veteran plates.

**Pearl Harbor Survivor** Beginning in about 1990 a special plate has been available for issue to survivors of the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In addition to those who were in the harbor itself, all persons who were in outlying locations on the island of Oahu (e.g., Hickam Field) and those who were at sea but no more than three miles off shore, are eligible, provided that the applicant was on station during the hours of 7:55 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. Hawaii time that day. Originally a totally separate and distinctive plate, it is now issued as a base plate similar to all other Armed Forces Veteran plates, except that the caption is changed to “Pearl Harbor Survivor” and the plate’s 3-digit serial number has a stacked alpha prefix of PHS. As with almost all other veteran plates, application is made using MVD10353, and fees are the same. [*Laws of 1989*, Ch. 162, § 1; *Laws of 1993*, Ch. 180, § 6; *Laws of 1995*, Ch. 8, § 5]

**Purple Heart** The Purple Heart plate has gone through at least three design iterations since its inception about 1990, but all three bear an image of the Purple Heart medal and the inscription “PURPLE HEART.” The current version is a distinctive design of purple numerals on a white background, along with the image of the Purple Heart medal. It also bears two inscriptions: “Purple Heart Recipient” and “Some gave all ... all gave some.” The serial has four digits followed by a stacked PH. The Purple Heart plate may be issued for up to two vehicles to any veteran who is a bona fide purple heart medal recipient and submits proof that he or she has been awarded that medal. For this plate all fees are waived, including the regular registration fee, as well as renewal fees. Imprinted in the renewal sticker box is the word “Permanent.” Sometimes a sticker bearing the designation “PRM” (for “Permanent”) will be seen in the sticker box. The application form is MVD10353.

Toward the end of 2014 a motorcycle version of the Purple Heart plate became available to qualified veterans, with the application procedure being the same as for an automobile. [*Las Cruces Sun-News*, November 27, 2014, p.A12, c.1] Although the New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services reports that there are more than 3,000 Purple Heart recipients living in New Mexico, probably not more than a couple hundred of them are motorcycle owners. Consequently, this variety of motorcycle tag is likely to remain scarce indefinitely.

The website photos for all plates in the above section will be found at:  
<https://NMplates.com/Veteran.htm>

## Other Proposed Special Plates

The New Mexico legislature has authorized the Motor Vehicle Division to issue special plates to recognize additional careers and organizations, but it is not unusual for a period of years to elapse between the authorization of a new type of plate and its first issuance. (The lawmakers also appear to be on the verge of authorizing the MVD to use its own discretion in developing and issuing special plates for any and all professions and causes it deems to be appropriately deserving.) The ones listed below are among those already specifically authorized by the legislature, though exactly when or if these will come to fruition is unknown.

**Civil Air Patrol Member, New Mexico Wing** The Civil Air Patrol, or CAP, is a U.S. Air Force auxiliary organization which assists during civil emergencies, including search and rescue for missing aircraft. The plate recognizes the contributions of the New Mexico Wing of the CAP. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 179, § 2]

**High School Rodeo Association** The National High School Rodeo Association (NHSRA) was founded with the goal of keeping students in school through graduation and to instill good conduct and sportsmanship. The plate is to recognize and promote the New Mexico High School Rodeo Association, which is affiliated with the national organization. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 212, § 2]

**Retired Law Enforcement Officer** To be made available to those who have retired from a career in law enforcement. This plate appears to be further along than most, with a graphic design already chosen. Indeed, a few of these plates have been seen without validation stickers, but whether they were actually intended to be issued, or are some type of sample, is something yet to be verified. [*Laws of 2009*, Ch. 86, § 1] One such example is pictured at: <https://NMplates.com/ProposedSpecialPlates.htm>

**Retired Letter Carrier** Intended for persons who have retired from a career with the U.S. Postal Service. Presumably anyone who has retired from that organization would be eligible, including counter clerks and others, not just carriers. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 172, § 2]

**Route 66 Motorcycle plate** It has been proposed that a motorcycle version of the Route 66 automobile plate be made available, but as with other proposed types there is uncertainty as to when or if this type will actually be released. A proposed design released by the MVD is illustrated at: <https://NMplates.com/ProposedSpecialPlates.htm>

**Search and Rescue Member** This plate would recognize persons who are active members of S&R groups within New Mexico. As some of these are independent organizations that are not necessarily sanctioned by any governmental agency, it remains to be seen what the eligibility criteria will be for the plate. [*Laws of 2003*, Ch. 201, § 2]



## Annual Validation / Renewal Stickers

New Mexico's first experiment with multi-year license plates was authorized by the *1919 Laws of New Mexico* which set the stage for the state's porcelain plates. These were first issued in 1920, then were renewed with metal revalidation seals (tabs) in 1921, 1922 and 1923. A serious problem arose because the seals were attached to the plates with split rivets, making them susceptible to theft by persons intent on evading registration fees. As a consequence, the system was abandoned in 1924.

Notwithstanding that unhappy experience there was much to be gained from the use of multi-year tags, not the least of which were the conservation of resources and retaining a larger share of registration fees for the state road fund, rather than wasting money buying tags that would be thrown away at the end of the year. But despite the potential advantages it would be almost four decades later—well into the modern license plate era—before the idea was considered at again. (The 1943 windshield stickers served a similar purpose for that one year, but were used in an entirely different way.)

Website photos of the stickers discussed in this section can be seen at: <https://NMplates.com/Stickers.htm>

### The Sticker Concept

By the 1950s durable, non-removable stickers had been perfected, leading New Mexico to take another look at the idea of using a multi-year plate. On April 22, 1959, Motor Vehicle Commissioner Benny Sanchez said that ordering steel for 1960 tags had been postponed pending a decision on whether continue making standard plates, or to instead use “a small reflectorized tag ... to be attached to 1959 plates.” [Farmington Daily Times, April 22, 1959, p.2, c.1]

A week later, on April 28, the office of Governor John Burroughs announced that new license plates would not be issued in 1960. It was now a matter of choosing between “a small reflectorized sticker or metal tag ... to place over the ‘1959’ designation” on the existing license plates. It was stated by the administration that it was believed that the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (later renamed 3M) was the only firm that made this reflectorized sticker-type of article, and the choice would be made depending on which of the two options was cheaper. [Clovis News-Journal, April 29, 1959, p.1, c.3]

The 3M product was sold under the trade name Scotchlite, and it was indeed the only viable material for the purpose at that time. Somewhat conveniently, the company's sales representative for New Mexico was Abe Ribble of Portales, who just happened to also be the Roosevelt County Democratic Chairman. [Albuquerque Tribune, April 29, 1959, p.22, c.7]

The plan was complicated by the fact that there was no really good place to affix a sticker on the 1959 plates. There was insufficient space in the upper corners, while the lower left corner was occupied by an embossed “19” and the lower right by an embossed “59.” Ideally, the state wanted to at least cover up the “59” in the lower right corner, but a sticker wasn’t going to stick to the irregular embossed surface. In the end the solution was to use a sticker on a flat metal tab which was in turn bolted over the “59” to hide it.

The Motor Vehicle Department ordered a half million of the stickered tabs from the penitentiary tag shop at a cost of \$15,000, the equivalent of three cents each. This amounted to a savings of \$135,000 over what it would have cost to manufacture new license plates. Contemporary news reports do not state the manner in which the stickers were attached to the tabs, but in view of the fact that the stickers on the thousands of surviving examples are all squarely placed on the tabs, it seems likely that some kind of automated machinery was employed.

The color of the reflective background on the stickers is today usually called “white,” but at the time the background was referred to as “silver.” The 2-digit date was imprinted on the stickers in red for cars and black for trucks. Trailer plate stickers used the 4-digit date but in smaller black numerals. The metal tabs themselves were red for cars and yellow for trucks and trailers. (ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner notes that the sticker-on-tab arrangement was unique to New Mexico, and was never used on passenger plates of any other state.)

Only one tab with sticker was issued to each vehicle. Car and truck owners were instructed to keep both 1959 plates on the car and attach the tab to the rear plate. Motorists were cautioned that even though a tab was used only on the back plate, the front and rear plates had to match each other. New registrations—of which there were about 15,000 in 1960—would had to have been issued 1959 plates to go with the tab, but reports of the time conflict as to whether they got one plate or two. If they were to conform to the instructions given to re-registrants, though, they would had to have received a matching pair.

All stickers had serial numbers and the Motor Vehicle Department cross-referenced the 1960 sticker serials with the 1959 plate serials. The associated numbers were then listed together in their records. [All details above from the *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, November 13, 1959, p.1, c.1]

The 1960 tabs went on sale at license plate distribution points throughout the state on December 15, 1959. The deadline for obtaining them without penalty was March 2, 1960. [*Farmington Daily Times*, December 13, 1959, p.1, c.5]

## **Introduction of Undated Base Plates**

The problem of the earlier embossed date interfering with the adhesion of the sticker was solved in 1961 by issuing an undated plate with plenty of room in the lower right corner for application of a sticker. (The lower left corner wasn't a viable location as the second digit of stacked 2-digit county numbers occupied part of that space.) But for 1961 itself no sticker at all was used, resulting in an entirely undated plate being used for the first time since 1913. Omitting the sticker saved the state about three cents per plate, or roughly \$15,000 in total for that year.

Also for 1961, Commissioner Sanchez made the decision to issue only one plate to each vehicle. This was actually in violation of existing law which called for two plates [*Laws of 1953*, Chapter 138, Sec. 51], but a subsequent law retroactively authorized the change. [*Laws of 1961*, Chapter 95, Sec. 1. See also *Santa Fe New Mexican*, December 2, 1962, p.18, c.4] The 1961 tags were the first civilian plates to use a reflective base. (Official plates had used a reflective base as early as 1952.) The plate colors were red on white for cars and green on white for trucks. The undated plates continued through 1964, but with the last two years painted instead of reflective. (Please see the "Passenger" chapter for details on why this change came about.) The renewals in 1962, 1963 and 1964 were all done with stickers. (Trucks received new plates in 1964.)

## **Final Years of Embossed Dates for Regular Issue Plates**

In the decade after 1961 there were only two new general reissues of license plates for cars (four for trucks). The first was for passenger cars in 1965. These carried an embossed date of "65" in the lower left corner and a blank area in the lower right corner for subsequent renewal stickers. Those with stacked county numbers had no embossed dates and were issued with a pre-applied sticker bearing only the numerals "65" in the lower right. The colors of both the plate and the sticker were New Mexico's traditional red on yellow, replicating those of the state flag, albeit with the license plates being reflective.

The second reissue for car plates occurred in 1972, concurrent with the abandonment of county numbers in favor of the 3-alpha, 3-numeral serial number format. Here again an embossed date—"72" in this case—appeared in the lower left corner, with the lower right reserved unencumbered for placement of renewal stickers. The plate colors were switched back to red on reflective white, perhaps to make it easier for law enforcement to verify that cars were properly registered that year.

During this period all years of car plates except 1965 and 1972 were validated with stickers.

General reissues with embossed dates were done for Truck plates in 1964, 1966, 1971 and 1975, with stickers used in all but the aforementioned four years. (Those with stacked county numbers in 1964 and 1966 received pre-applied “64” and “66” stickers, respectively, similar to what had been done for car plates in 1965.) Oddly, in 1971 stacked county number plates had a “71” embossed in the lower right corner, leaving no good place to affix renewal stickers. Although the three subsequent truck stickers were considerably smaller than those for car plates, the design resulted in the renewal stickers for 1972, 1973 and 1974 being plastered in random locations on the plates by their owners. (The official instructions were that for these plates the sticker was to be placed directly below the Zia symbol.) County numbers for Truck plates were abandoned with the 1975 reissue, which introduced a 2-alpha, 4-number serial. The tags had an embossed “75” in the lower right corner, but sufficient clear space remained at the top of the plate for a standard size renewal sticker in the subsequent years.

### **Sticker Boxes**

In the late 1970s modifications were made to car, truck and most other plates which, among other things, did away with the existing raised border. The most significant change, though, was the introduction of a rectangular depression in the lower right corner which is commonly referred to today as the “sticker box” (or sticker “well”). The sticker box clearly delineates where the renewal stickers are to be applied. At the same time a long narrow sticker box was added along the top edge of the plate for application of an optional county-name sticker.

The earliest sticker boxes had dimensions matching that of the 1" x 1½" stickers in use from 1975 through 1982. For 1983 the stickers were enlarged and standardized to 1¼" x 1¾" in order to accommodate the name of the expiration month required for the staggered registration system which had been implemented in April 1982. At the same time the license plates themselves were redesigned with an expanded sticker box to allow for the larger sticker, and motorcycle plates were given sticker boxes for the first time.

New Mexico’s yellow base plates continue to be issued to this day with a sticker box for renewal stickers but the county-name box was dropped in about 2001. Balloon base plates never had a county-name box but always had a sticker box right through the discontinuance of that base in 2010. The turquoise plates introduced in 2010 have no sticker box for either the validation sticker or the county-name sticker. Moreover, the turquoise plates issued to date for motorcycle and Amateur Radio Operator plates have insufficient space for application of the renewal sticker. If the sticker is not carefully trimmed ahead of time it will overlap the serial number on the bike plates, and will overlap the word “OPERATOR” on the ham plates. A similar situation exists for chile motorcycle plates.

## **Sticker Sizes, Materials and Colors**

Over the years the size of the New Mexico's validation stickers has been changed in one or both dimensions a number of times, though not dramatically. Additionally, motorcycle stickers were considerably smaller than car stickers during the years 1969-1970, 1974 and 1976-1980. Truck stickers were smaller than car stickers 1972-1974. Trailer stickers were smaller in 1972 only. In 1983, sticker size was standardized at 1¼" x 1¾" for all types of plates, including motorcycles. In order to accommodate the same larger size stickers as were used on full-size plates, correspondingly sized sticker boxes were added at the top center of motorcycle plates in 1983 as well.

It is known from contemporary news reports that New Mexico's very first stickers—the reflective ones of 1960—were made of 3M Scotchlite. [*Albuquerque Tribune*, April 29, 1959, p.22, c.7] Reflective stickers were used intermittently over the next several decades, and we can surmise that these were made of Scotchlite as well, if for no other reason than that the maker's patents kept interlopers at arm's length for quite a long time.

In virtually all of the years of non-reflective stickers, up to and including the present time, the material employed has most likely been vinyl. That supposition is bolstered by the fact that the Motor Vehicle Department explicitly announced the use of that material in 1975 and 1978, and the stickers of all the other non-reflective years have essentially the same visual appearance and feel. [*Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975; and *1978 New Mexico License Plates*, TMV-10263, June 1978, Jerry Manzagol, Director] Exceptions include 1963, when some of the state's stickers were made of paper while others were made of a plastic-like material (perhaps vinyl). The paper variety fared quite poorly in the elements and that material was never used again. The 1974 Stickers were made of an anodized (metallic) foil by the Lustre-Cal Nameplate Corp. of Lodi, California.

Beginning with the time they were first utilized by New Mexico, the colors of the validation stickers were changed every year, and in some years stickers for some types of plates were a different color from those for other types. The year-to-year change provided a way for law enforcement personnel to tell at a glance (if only at close range) whether a tag's registration was current. The annual color changes were ended in 2001, and from that time to the present all stickers have been black on white.

## **Sticker Serial Numbers**

All of New Mexico's stickers had serial numbers except those of 1971, and with rare exceptions the serial numbers on renewal stickers through 2001 did not match the serial numbers on the plates. The first exception was a perk of the

executive branch, when Governor John Burroughs received the very first sticker ever issued by the state of New Mexico. Applied to his Governor plate #1, the sticker also bore serial #1. Not only that, he was given two of the #1 stickers, which, along with the corresponding plates are illustrated in the chapter on “Governor” plates, and at: <https://NMplates.com/GovernorAndLtGovernor.htm>

In 1975 the state made a stab at numbering the stickers to match the tag serials. Not all stickers that year had serial numbers, but of the ones that did some were printed by computer and others were manually typewritten. [*Department of Motor Vehicles 1975 License Plates and Stickers*, Jerry Manzagol, Commissioner, publication DMV-P001, February 1975] Exactly how this worked has been lost to history, but in all probability the computer-printed stickers were generated in Santa Fe for renewals done by mail, while registrations renewed in person at field offices had the serial number added on a typewriter at the time of issue. Interestingly, the latter method must have been optional, as those stickers were a different style from the computer-printed ones, and had pre-printed, non-matching serial numbers on them as well. They are often seen with only the pre-printed serial. The experiment must have proved unsatisfactory, though, as with exception of some Weight Distance plates in the 1980s, it would be a quarter century before matching serial numbers were attempted again.

At long last, beginning with the black-on-white design introduced in 2001 for 2002 expirations, all stickers have had the same serial number as that on the plate, with the colors remaining constant since then as well. (Note: In some MVD publications the sticker serial number is referred to as a “Control Number.” [See, for example, *License Plates for 1972*, N.M. Department of Motor Vehicles])

## **Sample Stickers**

Sample stickers for passenger car plates are known for only a few years, most of which are in the 1960s and 1970s. Most of these have serial numbers of all zeroes, except 1971 which not only has no serial number at all but is in a color different from that of actual 1971 stickers. A very few non-passenger sample stickers are known, with most of those being from just two years, 1970 and 1974. Many of the known sample stickers, both passenger and non-passenger, are illustrated in the “Samples” chapter, where other variations will be seen, as well as at: <https://NMplates.com/Samples.htm>

## **License Plate Renewal Cycle**

New Mexico’s first plates, issued in 1912, expired on November 1, 1913, but this was changed by the 1913 Motor Vehicle Law so that all plates expired on December 31. The state’s tags were now tied to the calendar year and remained that way for the next seven decades. This seemingly logical system was actually a terrible way of doing business because virtually all of the renewals had to be processed during the month of December—an enormously burdensome task. The job was further exacerbated by coinciding with the annual Christmas holiday season when many employees probably preferred to be on vacation.

The legislature and the state officials responsible for the renewals later bought some relief by enacting a grace period that extended into the new registration year. At various times the extension was set at anywhere from 30 to 90 days, which was at least a partial reprieve.

By 1982 the Motor Vehicle Department was faced with well over a million renewals to deal with and it became imperative to overhaul the system. In April of that year the state introduced a staggered registration system. With this method the plate's renewal sticker bears not just an expiration year, but an expiration month as well. The plate expires the following year, and in the same month as the registration was initially made, spreading the Department's workload out fairly evenly over the entire year.

### **The Sticker Era Comes of Age**

After the 1972 issues (1975 for trucks, motorcycles, trailers and some other plates) there have been no regular-issue civilian tags with embossed dates. For the past four decades now—excepting only certain political, judicial and Official tags, along with a few Amateur Radio, vanity and other plates—New Mexico's license plates have been defined by, and dated by, stickers. Indeed, in many cases the stickers are the most distinctive feature which differentiates plates of one year from those of another in the years since stickers were introduced.

### **Sticker Trivia**

Did you ever wonder why some stickers have square corners and some have rounded corners? Well, the ones with rounded corners stay stuck a little bit better, but the square corner variety is slightly cheaper to manufacture, so it's a tradeoff between cost and quality.

That said, why do some 1974 stickers have one rounded corner and three square corners? And why do some of those have a rounded lower right corner (e.g., passenger and trailer), while others have a rounded upper right corner (dealer, ham radio, vanity). And why is the radius of that one rounded corner much greater than that of the rounded corners of the stickers from any other year?

Passenger plates in use for 1974 were the 1972 base with an embossed "72" in the lower left corner and a blank area in the lower right for application of the renewal sticker. Trailer tags were still on the 1971 base with an embossed "71" in the lower left corner and a blank space for the sticker in the lower right corner. The radius of the rounded lower right corner of their 1974 stickers matches the inside radius of the raised border of the plate, enabling the stickers to be neatly tucked into the corner. Dealer, ham radio and vanity plates were all on a 1973 base with an embossed "73" in the lower *right* corner. Their 1974 stickers had a rounded upper right corner so that they would tuck neatly into the *upper* right plate corner, just as the passenger and trailer stickers did in the lower right corner.

Website photos of the stickers discussed in this section can be seen at:  
<https://NMplates.com/Stickers.htm>

## Prorate Backing Plates and Stickers

Prior to the end of World War II most interstate freight shipments traveled by rail, a circumstance which began to change dramatically after the war. In the late 1940s more and more freight began to move via motor truck over the nation's improving highways, with the tonnage escalating even further when construction of the Interstate Highway System was initiated in 1956.

Decades earlier New Mexico had already begun requiring commercial trucks and trailers from other states to be registered and the attendant fees paid for the privilege of hauling freight into or through the state. The Land of Enchantment was by no means the only state to do this, with the result that commercial vehicles moving over interstate routes were forced to display multiple license plates on their bumpers—sometimes a dozen or more. Adding insult to injury, it was often the case that the full annual registration fee had to be paid in each state, irrespective of how many miles were driven there.

By the late 1940s a number of states had begun entering into reciprocal agreements to mitigate—if not entirely eliminate—some of this adverse impact on both commercial and non-commercial vehicles, and in 1947 the New Mexico legislature established a three-person Reciprocity Commission to implement such agreements. The State Comptroller was chairman of the commission, and serving with him were the chairmen of the Highway Commission and the State Corporation Commission. [*Laws of 1947*, Chapter 56]

Then in 1955 DMV officials from New Mexico and eight other western states met with the objective of arriving at a more comprehensive resolution to the problem of duplicative fees and plates. The multiple plates, though a nuisance, were the lesser concern. The primary objective was to arrive at a system of more equitable payment of registration fees based on the number of miles driven in each state as a proportion of the total number of miles driven during the year.

After several of these meetings the Western Proration Agreement was reached between the nine original states and became effective January 1, 1956. Although there may have been an earlier method of implementing the system, on January 1, 1957 the “prorate backing plate” was introduced for use in all of the member states. This was a generic blank plate consisting of a grid of sticker boxes separated by raised (embossed) lines. Each vehicle (e.g., truck or trailer) would now carry only a license plate from its home state plus the prorate backing plate. Each other state where the vehicle operated would supply a special prorate sticker to be placed in one of the sticker boxes, and the registration fees in each state would be prorated according to the number of miles driven there, as a proportion of the vehicle's total miles for the year.



The grid appearance of the prorate backing plate, incidentally, gave rise to several nicknames for the tag, including “bingo board” and “waffle plate,” to name just a couple.

The stickers applied to the backing plates carried designations as to the type of vehicle licensed. As the technical name for the “truck” or “power unit” pulling a trailer is “tractor” (hence, the term “tractor-trailer”), their stickers were typically imprinted “TRACTOR” or “POWER.” Stickers for trailers and semi-trailers were imprinted “TRAILER.” Sometimes, but not always, the word “PRORATE” was printed on the sticker as well.

By 1967 additional states had joined with the original nine western states, and the agreement was renamed the Uniform Proration Agreement (UPA). Later it was renamed again as the Uniform Vehicle Registration Proration and Reciprocity Agreement (UVRPRA). Over time other agreements or “compacts” came into being in other states under separate names.

Ultimately these agreements began to be superseded by the International Registration Plan (IRP) which came about in the early 1970s. As more states signed on with the IRP the bingo boards began to disappear. By the early 1990s they were gone from most states, and in New Mexico were replaced by IRP plates bearing an IR prefix and/or the word APPORTIONED. (Please see the sections on IRP and Apportioned plates for more details on these.)

[Most details in the above section on prorate backing plates are based on two articles published by ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner: “No More Waffling – The Real Scoop on Prorate Backing Plates,” *PLATES*, Automobile License Plates Collectors Association, April 2009; and “Prorate Backing Plates Used in Interstate Trucking – Bingo!,” *Wheels of Time*, American Truck Historical Society, January 2012. Additional historical information and citations of source material will be found in those articles.]

Prorate backing plates and stickers are illustrated in both the hard copy version of this book, and on the NMplates.com website at:

<https://NMplates.com/ProrateBackingPlatesAndStickers.htm>

# Variations in Modern New Mexico License Plates

From their inception in 1912 through their first half century of use, New Mexico's license plates were considered by many to be the most colorful of any state. Since about 1961, though, many historians and collectors have lamented the seemingly unchanging appearance of the modern plates issued since then. In seeking relief from what some see as monotony, they look for differences among these newer tags which can identify plates as being truly unique.

In an earlier chapter it was mentioned that over the years New Mexico license plates have been produced in countless variations—some intentional and some accidental, some subtle and others not so subtle. These varieties appeared not just in connection with the annual registration changeover, but also within individual license years. Their numbers are so vast that an entire volume would be needed to encompass every variant. It is for that reason that only the most significant varieties were addressed for the pre-1956 plates, and the same approach is taken here for the 1956 and later plates.

For the most part our coverage in the following pages relates primarily to design variations which are found on the front of the plate. And although different classes of plates (passenger, truck, motorcycle, trailer, etc.) can be found to have their own individual variations, we have elected to focus primarily on variations in passenger and truck plates. The reader can then use these as a guide to ferret out similar (and not-so-similar) variations in other types. Changes which are not readily apparent from the front, such as the type and thickness of the metal used to make the plates, are highlighted in only the most significant instances. With that in mind, we begin our discussion with the first passenger car plate of the “modern” era.

## Passenger Plate Variations

### 1956 Passenger

This was the year that most states—New Mexico included—standardized to the 6" x 12" license plate size. Prior to this year there had been variations in the length of New Mexico's tags, but since 1933 they had always been in the range of roughly 13½ to 14 inches long. The reduction in length to 12 inches trimmed by one the number of serial number digits that the license plates could accommodate.

The loss of this space was initially not a problem, and the state settled on a design that consisted of the county prefix number followed by the Zia, followed by the tag serial number. Centered at the top was the “LAND OF ENCHANTMENT” slogan, and centered at the bottom was the state name spelled out in full. The two-digit year “56” was embossed in both the lower left and lower right corners. The latter arrangement was a first for the state, and from the standpoint of the reduced size of the tag and the unique double presentation of the date one could argue that the 1956 plate itself was a “variation” with respect to prior years.

### **1957 Passenger**

Other than colors, the format for 1957 was identical to that of the prior year, this time with “57” embossed in both of the lower corners. With the shorter plate length introduced the previous year, those counties with two-digit numbers had room for only four digits to the right of the Zia symbol, allowing for at most 9,999 plates in each county. This became a concern when some of those counties reached 10,000 registrations not long before the middle of the 1957 license year. (Among the earliest to encounter the problem were counties 16 and 17, i.e., San Juan and Rio Arriba, respectively). [*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, June 19, 1957, p.4, c.2]

The solution was to reduce the size of the two county number digits and stack them vertically at the left side. This freed up space for one more serial number digit, permitting up to 100,000 registration numbers in each of the respective counties before the plates would again run out of room.

The height of the two-digit county number stack was such that it partially protruded into both the lower left and upper left corners of the plate—areas which were already occupied by the extra “57” in the lower left, and in the upper left by the word “LAND” in the state’s slogan. To accommodate the stack it was necessary to eliminate the superfluous “57” at the bottom, and slide the slogan about an inch to the right. In other words, the slogan was no longer centered.

The end result was that there are two varieties of the 1957 plates which have 2-digit county numbers—the “normal” variety with side-by-side county digits for plate serials up through 9999, and the stacked variety for those with plate serials 10000 and above. The latter, of course, also have the left-hand “57” removed and the state slogan shifted to the right. Only a very few of the two-digit counties exceeded 9,999 registrations in 1957, and even those by just a relatively small number, so the stacked variety for this year is rather scarce. There are, however, a very few late-year county 15 plates with stacked county numerals but only 4-digit serials. (There could be other counties like this as well.) The switch to the stacked arrangement occurred somewhere between 15-7131 and 15-7549, with the highest known being 15-8427. If one counts the one-digit county plates as a separate style, there would be a total of four major varieties for the year.

Incidentally, a very few 1957 truck plates with fewer than five digits are known to exist with stacked county numbers. As far as can be told, both the passenger and truck tags of this variety were issued late in the year, probably after the dies and machinery had been switched over for production of 1958 plates.

Those who wish to count die changes as major variations will find that late in 1957 the plates for at least some counties (including all stacked 2-digit counties) were manufactured using dies  $\frac{1}{4}$ " shorter in height than the ones in use earlier in the year (i.e.,  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " vs.  $2\frac{3}{4}$ "). The shorter dies then continued in use for all plates in 1958 and for quite a few years thereafter.

### **1958 Passenger**

Taking into consideration the continued rapid growth of automobile ownership, it was apparent that stacking the county numbers would ultimately be required for all of the 2-digit counties. For 1958, therefore, the state elected to stack the county number digits starting at the beginning of the year, regardless of the number of digits in the serial number. This was done for all of the counties numbered 10 and higher, and remained the case for as long as county prefixes continued to be used (through 1971 for cars and 1974 for trucks).

There was also a format change for the single-digit-county plates. Whereas in the two previous years the two-digit date had been embossed in both lower corners, for 1958 a "19" was now embossed in the lower left corner and a "58" in the lower right. But it was necessary to forgo the "19" on the stacked-county plates, and of course the slogan was again shifted to the right on these tags.

The distinct styles of the one-digit and two-digit county number plates therefore constitute the two major varieties that exist for 1958.

(The stacked county number design was applied to truck plates beginning in 1958 as well, though it would be several years before any county would need the extra digit for trucks.)

### **1959-1960 Passenger**

The 1958 design for both of the aforementioned varieties was carried forward to 1959, with only the colors and date changed. The immediate problem of not having sufficient space for the serial number had been solved and the only worry left was what would happen when counties reached 100,000 registrations and the plates would again be a digit short in length. This happened sooner than might have been expected when Bernalillo County (#2, the most populous county, which includes Albuquerque) tipped the scales in this direction sometime during the 1959-1960 license years.

The solution this time was to use the letter “A” in place of the first numeric digit, beginning with what would have otherwise been serial 100000. In other words, the first number of the new series was 2\*A-1, where “\*” is the Zia symbol. Because registration records at the county level were not preserved, and because the tags were reused in 1960 (with a renewal sticker), there is a degree of uncertainty as to exactly when the event occurred. It is likely, however, that the A series was initiated in 1960, and most probably in the latter part of that year.

On those plates bearing an alpha-numeric serial number, and whose numeric part of the serial was 999 or lower, a hyphen was inserted between the alpha and numeric portions.

So for 1960 we can first count two major varieties for counties 1 to 9, i.e., those plates with all-numeric serials, and those with serials containing one alpha character. The latter are known to exist with a serial as high as 2-A9257. Assuming all of these were issued in pairs, there would have been roughly 18,500 of the “alpha” variety manufactured. Additionally, there are the plates of the stacked county type (counties 10 and above) whose serials were all-numeric, making a third variety. If the hyphen is counted as a separate variety, the count is even greater.

### **1961-1964 Passenger**

The 1961 plates were undated, then renewed with stickers 1962-1964. The undated base plates exist in both reflective and painted form, and it has long been espoused by many that the two types were issued concurrently beginning in 1961. In fact, the reflective bases were issued only in 1961 and 1962, and were renewable with stickers through 1964. The painted bases were issued only in 1963 and 1964, with the '63 renewable by sticker the following year. [*Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 5, 1962, p.2, c.1] An exception is that a very few passenger and trailer plates issued very late in 1962 are known to have been manufactured on the painted base. (These were also renewable through 1964.)

Bernalillo County again was provided with plates using a letter as the first character of the serial number. This certainly would have begun no later than 1962, and quite possibly in the latter part of 1961. The number sequence is known to have reached at least into the “K” series. Taking into account that New Mexico was never known to have used the letter “I” on its license plates (excepting vanity plates) and the fact that there are no known examples from this era using the letters D, F, or H, either, there would have been perhaps 60,000 of the “alpha” variety plates manufactured during the four-year span. These were on top of the first 99,999 Bernalillo tags which had all-numeric serials.

From the foregoing we can see that during 1961-1964 there were four major varieties:

- (1) Reflective, all-numeric serial, which exists for all counties.
- (2) Reflective, with an alpha first character in the serial, Bernalillo County only.
- (3) Painted, all-numeric, all counties, with the probable exception of Bernalillo.
- (4) Painted, with an alpha first character in the serial, Bernalillo County only.

Within the above types, (1) and (3) can be subdivided into those with stacked and those with non-stacked county prefixes, bringing the variety count up to six. Counting the hyphen as a separate type further increases the number.

In 1963 there were two varieties of stickers issued—some made of paper and some of vinyl. As yet it has not been determined whether they were issued concurrently or if one type replaced the other. In either case, both sticker types may have been issued to all six of the base plate varieties described above. If one wishes to consider the two sticker types as “major” variations themselves, then in 1963 alone there would be a total of twelve varieties of tags in use.

### **1965-1971 Passenger**

A general reissue of passenger plates was carried out in 1965 in essentially the same manner as had been done with truck plates the preceding year (see below). The passenger colors were switched to red on reflective yellow with an embossed “65” in the lower left corner for counties 1-9, and a pre-applied non-serialized red-on-reflective-yellow “65” sticker in the lower right corner for counties 10 and above. These plates were renewable through 1971 with stickers.

On newly-issued plates in 1969 the embossed “65” in the lower left corner was changed to an embossed “19” for counties 1-9 and the lower right corner remained blank to accommodate the sticker. The letters “USA” were added after the state name this year as well. Of course the “19” had to be omitted on the stacked county number plates, such that those 1969 base plates would be indistinguishable from the similar 1965 bases were it not for the “USA” on the later one and the “65” pre-applied sticker on the earlier one.

In 1970 the embossed “19” was deleted from even the one-digit county tags, leaving all the plates—both stacked and non-stacked—entirely undated save for the 1970 and subsequent 1971 sticker. This implies that 1969 and 1970 stacked-county base plates cannot be told apart in the absence of registration records for those years (which were not preserved). However if there were a very, very low serial on one example, and a very, very high serial on another, one could infer the dates on that basis.

Meanwhile, after Bernalillo County's first 99,999 plates had been issued in 1965, the state again resorted to use of an alpha character in the serial number's first digit. This was continued successively all the way through 1971, reaching at least to the high end of the "Y" series. As was the case beginning in 1959-1960, a further variation was injected by the insertion of a hyphen between the letter and the numeric portion of the serial on those plates whose numeric part was 999 or lower. Use of the hyphen was terminated at the end of the "L" series, and was not known to have been used on serials lettered "M" or higher.

Altogether this made for quite a number of distinct varieties of passenger plates during the seven years that the 1965/1969/1970 style base was in use. We leave it to the reader to puzzle out the exact number of different styles.

### **1972-1973 Passenger**

As noted, the serial numbers of the 1965-1971 passenger base plates had been run up to the "Y" series in Bernalillo County by the end of 1971, so it was evident that a second digit of the serial number would very soon have to be converted from numeric to alpha as well. Other counties would not be far behind. This led the state to completely discard the county prefix system beginning with the 1972 plates and implement the 3-alpha/3-numeric serial that had already been adopted by other more populous states.

Taking into account that New Mexico usually refrained from using the letters I, O, Q, U and V, the new format could at a minimum support well over nine million unique serial numbers (less any letter combinations that might be considered objectionable). With that in mind the new design was introduced at the beginning of 1972 as a general reissue of all passenger plates (but not other types). The new tags were red on reflective white with the serial number in the middle, and with the Zia symbol separating the alpha and numeric portions of the serial. The serial numbers started at AAA-001.

Centered at the top was the "LAND OF ENCHANTMENT" slogan and centered at the bottom was "NEW MEXICO USA." An embossed "72" was placed in the lower left corner, with the lower right corner unobstructed so that renewal stickers could be placed there in subsequent years.

This new standardized design was used throughout the state for all passenger cars, with the result that there are no major variations for 1972-1973. (Minor variations, however, can be detected in the thickness of the metal used and the shape of the bolt holes.)

## **1974 Passenger**

For more than two decades New Mexico had not deviated from its use of steel as the exclusive material for its license plates. That metal was still in use as the 1974 plate production year began, and continued until the tags were in the BCT serial number group. At this point production ground to a standstill because the supply of steel at the prison had been exhausted and no more was scheduled to be delivered. (The situation had come about through a combination of nationwide materials shortages which were tied in part to the Arab oil embargo imposed the previous October, and inept planning on the part of bureaucrats.)

The state had no choice but to print up thousands of flimsy paper license plates whose design replicated the current metal plate design with the exception that the two-digit year “74” was printed in the lower right corner. The paper plates were issued (primarily for new registrations) for a couple of months or so until a supply of aluminum was obtained. With this material on hand the prison plate shop began stamping out aluminum plates bearing serial numbers matching those on the paper plates which had been previously issued. These aluminum plates had an embossed “74” in the lower left corner, and were mailed out to the holders of paper plates with the corresponding serial numbers. By the time the new aluminum plates caught up with the issued paper plates, the paper serial numbers, which had begun in the BCW series, had reached into the BFC series. All of the replacement metal tags could be renewed annually in subsequent years.

At this point the prison moved on to regular production of new plates, making use of the aluminum now on hand but reverting to the original 1972 design, including, oddly enough, the old “72” date. These began with the BFD series. [The starting and ending serials mentioned above and elsewhere in this chapter are from verified observations recorded by ALPCA Archivist Eric Tanner.]

In summary, for 1974 we identify four major varieties, which appeared in this order and which (except for the paper plates) were renewable in subsequent years:

- (1) Dated 1972 base with 1974 sticker, made of steel.
- (2) Dated 1974 paper plate.
- (3) Dated 1974 base replacing paper plate, made of aluminum.
- (4) Dated 1972 base with 1974 sticker, made of aluminum.

Matched sets of the 1974 paper/metal tags are exceedingly rare because in at least some, if not all counties motorists were required to display the paper plates on the rear bumper where they succumbed to the elements within days.

## **1975 Passenger**

The three metal plate varieties tallied above carried forward into 1975 with renewal stickers, so this year counts those same three major varieties.



## **1976 Passenger**

Although the 1972 and 1974 base plates continued to be valid indefinitely as long as they were appropriately renewed, a new base plate was introduced in 1976 for new registrants only. It was again a red-on-reflective-white base, but this time with no raised border, and it continued to carry the old “72” embossed date. With a serial number sequence starting at BTN-001, these tags brought with them several major design changes. First, the state’s slogan was moved to the bottom of the plate, to a point just above the state name, and the “USA” in use since 1969 was dropped. Second, a rectangular depression—officially called the sticker well, but popularly called the “sticker box”—was introduced at the lower right corner, making it unequivocally clear where the validation stickers were to be placed. Finally, a long narrow sticker box (well) was provided along the top edge for placement of a county name sticker which was to be issued along with the plate.

The three metal plate varieties from the previous four years were still being revalidated with renewal stickers, so those three types continue to be counted, making a total of four varieties with the new 1976 base. If one wishes to take into account the fact that there were two distinct styles of 1976 sticker issued, then there are potentially as many as eight varieties for the bicentennial year.

## **1977-1982 Passenger**

Late in 1977 New Mexico introduced yet another base for new registrants. The colors were changed to red on reflective yellow, but the design was otherwise almost identical to that of the new base introduced the previous year. To recap, its design elements were: No raised border, serial number in the middle, embossed “LAND OF ENCHANTMENT” slogan over the embossed state name at the bottom with no “USA,” a validation sticker box in lower right corner, county name sticker box along top edge and no embossed date. This style was produced into the first several months of 1982 with an overall serial number range of CCX-001 to EGZ-999. The four earlier varieties were still being renewed, making a total now of five varieties in use during the time this base plate was being issued.

## **1982-1988 Passenger**

Production of the 1977 base ended in the spring of 1982 with the type being replaced by a similar design whose principal difference was that the state slogan and the state name were incorporated as a graphic in the reflective sheeting rather than being embossed in the metal as they had been in prior years. The name and the slogan were also switched in position with each other and the state name was made larger while the slogan was made smaller. For unknown reasons, the letters “USA” after the state name continued to be omitted.

The five earlier varieties were still being renewed annually, though in decreasing numbers as cars were sold or junked. But the 1982 design brought the count to six.

Those who care to consider the type of material from which the plate was made as a major variation can count instead seven types for the period as in the latter part of 1984 the metal was switched from aluminum to galvanized steel. The aluminum plates were made in the series EHA-001 to GZG-999, and the steel version in the series GZH-001 to KAJ-999.

Because staggered registration had been implemented in April 1982, there had since that time been two distinct styles of validation stickers each year—those bearing just the two-digit year for plates originally registered before April 1, 1982, and those bearing both the year and a month for those originally registered on and after that date. With the stickers taken into consideration, the number of varieties potentially doubles, though the introduction of the latter sticker type (month/year) coincided with the introduction of the 1982 base plate and was being issued only to that base. However, as New Mexico is a plate-to-owner state, a person who sold a car could re-register the old plate to a new car, bringing any and all of the five earlier plate varieties into the staggered registration system, thereby receiving the new type of sticker. This would have occurred in admittedly small numbers, though. The two styles of renewal stickers, incidentally, are known to have been issued concurrently in all years 1982 through 1988, inclusive.

### **1988-1989 Passenger**

In the middle of 1988 the letters “USA” were reinstated after the state name as a revision to the 1982 design and the change was incorporated into the graphic design of the reflective sheeting as the state name itself had been already. These were in the series KAK-001 to LKL-999 and the number of varieties now in use was up to at least seven, not even considering the type of metal or style of sticker.

### **1990-2000 Passenger**

At the beginning of 1991 a revamped design with more graphic features was debuted. In the two upper corners were strips in turquoise representing Native American art work. In the lower left corner was a picture of a yucca plant, the state flower, also in turquoise. The “LAND OF ENCHANTMENT” slogan remained in the same place, but it, too, was now turquoise, a change from the red it had been for the past three decades. Significantly, the 3-alpha/3-numeric serial format was reversed to a 3-numeric/3-alpha configuration, beginning with 001-AAA. Popularly called the “yucca base,” this design has endured for almost a quarter century with little change and is still available to New Mexico motorists today.

Shortly before this new yucca base was to make its initial appearance, the prison apparently ran out of the reflective sheeting containing the earlier graphics. Rather than begin issuing the 001-AAA series early, the new graphic sheeting was used on the last 20,000 or so plates made in 1990, retaining the earlier 3-alpha / 3-numeric serial format. These were in the LKM-001 to LLL-999 series.

These two issues brought the variety count up to no fewer than nine types in use, again ignoring metal type and sticker style.

Importantly however, at the beginning of 1991 the state began a general replacement of all of the 1972 and later 3-alpha/3-numeric plates, supplanting them with the new 3-numeric/3-alpha yucca base plates. The replacement was phased in over two and a half years such that by the middle of 1993 all of the older varieties had been retired, leaving just the one new variety on the road.

New Mexico trailer plates from roughly 1992 through 1999 omitted the yucca and the “LAND OF ENCHANTMENT” slogan. The state name (including “USA”) was made smaller and moved to the bottom edge of the plate. This was done to free up space for insertion of the embossed word “TRAILER” under the serial and above the state name. In 1997, thousands of passenger car plates were made (for 1998 expirations) with the graphic sheeting that had been designed for the trailer plates, but without the embossing of the word “TRAILER.” These included plates in the 001-KFH to 999-KGC and the 001-KGN to 999-KHM series, but whether this was done in error or because the supply of passenger car style reflective sheeting had been temporarily exhausted is unknown.

Whichever the case, the count of base plate varieties concurrently in use was back up to two.

Throughout the years that the yucca base has been in use there have been a number of relatively smaller changes in the graphics and other features, and some readers will want to investigate these on their own to build up an even more expansive variety list.

### **2000-2010 Passenger**

The hot air balloon plate, or “balloon base,” was introduced in early 1999, with most of these plates having an initial expiration in 2000. The serial number system was changed to what one might call a floating 2-alpha/4-numeric scheme. These tags appeared with serials in the following order: NM0001 to NM9999, 0NM001 to 9NM999, 00NM01 to 99NM99, 000NM1 to 999NM9, 0001NM to 9999NM. After several months all of the possible combinations were exhausted and numbering started over at AA 001, running to BZ 999. The serials were then switched to a more conventional 3-alpha/3-numeric plan, beginning at CAA001. An exceptionally rare variety with a 3-numeric/3-alpha pattern came into being when a balloon replacement plate was requested for a yucca base and the MVD for reasons

unknown went to the trouble to reuse the yucca serial on the balloon replacement. (Only one such tag is known, but there are probably a few others yet to be found.)

Note that no Zia separator was used in any of the numbering arrangements on the balloon plates, though a blank space was used between the alpha and numeric characters in the AA to BZ series.

Counting all serial variations, the balloon plates had added eight more varieties, bringing our list to at least ten types on the road.

### **2010-present Passenger**

The introduction of the turquoise centennial plate in 2010 (mostly with 2011 expirations) was accompanied by the elimination of the balloon base for new registrations. (Existing balloon plates can be renewed indefinitely, while the yucca base continues to be available both for renewals and for new registrations.) The turquoise serials commenced at LGR-001, picking up where the balloon serials had been terminated. The only known significant variety of the turquoise tag came about when the “1912-2012 CENTENNIAL” slogan at the top of the plate was retired in 2016 because it was no longer timely.

With that deletion, not to mention the introduction of the new chile plate on July 10, 2017, we can see that no fewer than a dozen major varieties can potentially be in use on New Mexico’s highways at the present time. Add to this the numerous variations observed from 1956 to 1991, along with the many lesser variations in materials, stickers and so forth, and it becomes readily apparent that New Mexico’s modern passenger plates are not so monotonous as they might seem at first glance. Website photos of the varieties discussed here, and more than a hundred others are at: <https://NMplates.com/Varieties.htm>

## **Truck Plate Variations**

### **1956-1963 Truck**

The design of truck plates closely followed that of car plates for all years 1956-1963 except that the colors were different. From ’56 to ’60 truck tags were the reverse color of those for car plates. In 1961 and 1962 trucks were green on reflective white, and in 1963 they were green on painted white. Both the reflective white and the painted white had a distinctive greenish tint to them, as compared to car plates which were not tinted. Because a small number of passenger car and trailer plates issued very late in 1962 are known to have been issued on painted bases, the possibility is open that a few 1962 truck plates on painted bases might someday be found as well.

When passenger cars went over 10,000 registrations in some of the two-digit counties in 1957, thereby necessitating stacking of their county code digits, truck registrations were still several years away from reaching this point.

Nonetheless, a few 1957 truck plates with serials *under* 10000 are known to exist with stacked two-digit county codes. Since none of the 1956 county prefixes were stacked, that year had but one major variety for trucks. The appearance of stacked county numbers in 1957 raised the count to two. The state then elected to stack the two-digit county codes for *all* plates beginning in 1958 for both cars and trucks alike. Once all of the two digit codes were stacked in 1958 there became two truck varieties in each of the years 1958-1960.

As noted above, trucks had received reflective plates 1961-1962 and painted plates 1963. Consequently, by 1963 the two varieties carried forward as renewals from the prior two years now became four varieties in use with the addition of the two painted varieties (i.e., stacked and non-stacked) in 1963. Taking into account the two types of 1963 stickers (paper and vinyl) the number doubles to eight.

### **1964-1965 Truck**

New Mexico conducted a general reissue of truck plates in 1964, using an embossed “64” in the lower left corner for counties 1-9 and a pre-applied non-serialized black-on-reflective-yellow “64” sticker in the lower right corner for counties 10 and above (i.e., for the “stacked” counties). The 1964 base plate was reused in 1965 with a silver-on-red renewal sticker. Hence, there are two distinct truck tag varieties for both 1964 and 1965, with the pre-applied sticker being unique for any type of plate up to this point in time.

### **1966-1970 Truck**

Although the trend by this time was to use license plates for as long as possible, in 1966 New Mexico implemented another general reissue of truck plates just two years after the last one, this time using colors of dark blue on reflective white, but with most other design elements unchanged. Counties 1-9 had an embossed “66” in the lower left corner, while the higher-numbered stacked counties came with a non-serialized blue-on-reflective-white pre-applied “66” sticker in the lower right corner. Further stirring the pot, the letters “USA” were added after the state name on this base in 1969, just as they had been added on car plates that year. The embossed “66” date was dropped on the one-digit-county plates in 1969 as well, and of course the two-digit-county tags didn’t have it to start with. In summary, there are two varieties for 1966-1968, and two more for 1969-1970, for a total of four for this period.

### **1971-1974 Truck**

In 1971, for the third time in seven years, New Mexico carried out a general reissue of truck plates. The new colors were white on reflective green, and the design was almost identical to that introduced in 1966. Almost, but not quite. Counties 1-9 were given an embossed “71” in the lower left corner, with

the lower right corner left free for renewal stickers. The stacked counties 10-32 couldn't have a "71" in the lower left corner but, surprisingly, an embossed "71" was placed in the lower right corner, leaving no place for stickers to be applied later. The 1972-1974 renewal stickers for truck plates, however, were redesigned with a reduced height and a greater width. Officially, these stickers were required to be placed directly beneath the Zia, but more often than not they are found plastered in random locations on the plates. But the bottom line was that there are two major varieties of 1971-1974 truck plates: single-digit counties with "71" in the lower left, and stacked counties with "71" in the lower right.

### **1975-1992 Truck**

A general reissue of almost all non-passenger plates was carried out in 1975. Most such plates were standardized to a red on reflective yellow color scheme, and truck tags finally dropped the county prefix format just as automobile plates had done three years earlier. The new serial plan for trucks was a 2-alpha / 4-numeric layout with the Zia as a separator between the alpha and numeric portions. The state name was reduced to a small abbreviation at the upper left corner and the "LAND OF ENCHANTMENT" slogan was moved to the bottom of the plate. An embossed "75" appeared in the lower right corner, requiring that renewal stickers be placed in the upper right corner.

In 1977 a new red-on-yellow undated base plate design similar to the 1976 passenger plate was debuted. This brought with it elimination of the raised border, and reinstatement of the state name spelled out in full at the bottom of the plate, just below the slogan. Also introduced were a renewal sticker box (sticker well) in the lower right corner and a county name sticker box along the top edge.

In 1982 the embossed slogan and state name were changed to the graphic format instituted on passenger plates the same year. And as was the case with the car tags, the letters "USA" were not used.

In 1988 the "USA" was reinstated in graphic form at the end of the state name.

Issuance of truck plates as a unique type was discontinued in 1991, but with renewals of existing plates permitted through 1992. During the 1991-1992 period all trucks were transitioned to passenger plates.

Because the 1975 truck tag issues and all that followed could be renewed indefinitely, there were as many as five versions on the road at the same time during the last few years that truck plates as a distinctive type were in use. All told, there were at least seventeen truck varieties during the modern era. If one cares to consider the type of metal used and different styles of validation stickers, then there are many more.

Website photos of the varieties discussed here, and more than a hundred others are at: <https://NMplates.com/Varieties.htm>

# Index

**How to use the Index:** References are given as chapter number and page number within the chapter. For example, 23-15 refers to Chapter 23, page 15. The notation PhPg refers to the photo pages within a given chapter, e.g., 17-PhPg means that the subject of interest will be found within the photo pages of Chapter 17. (The photo pages themselves are not numbered.) Typically, a reference to photo pages includes information in the caption(s), as well as the photos themselves.

Index entries which are capitalized refer in most cases to a chapter title, a sub-heading within a chapter, or a proper name of a person, place, or publication. Where multiple references are listed for a topic, the principal text discussion of that subject is indicated by the chapter and page numbers being in **bold** type.

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