

# Florida License Plates

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**INTRODUCTION:** At the May 2010 meeting of the Antique Auto Club of Cape Canaveral / Canaveral Region AACA there was a lady selling a number of old Florida License plates. Also, there were a few comments made in the meeting about the county numbers, prefixes, etc. on these older plates. It was apparent that only a few had a good knowledge of the history of Florida plates. The following is a brief history of the automobile plates of Florida. These photographs were gleaned from various digital sources.

**EARLY FLORIDA PLATES:** The State of Florida was the last of the 48 states to have a unified State issued plate. In May 11, 1905 a State law was passed that required all motor-driven vehicles to be registered with the Secretary of State for a \$2 fee. The registrant was then given a number which was to be reproduced on a homemade plate with the plate being a minimum of 3" high and at least 2" long and placed in a conspicuous place on the rear of the vehicle. These ranged from hand painted wood or metal units to leather plates with metal house numbers riveted in place. In 1909 the requirement to show FLA was added to the law, and further, it required the plate to be 4 ½" x 14" of flat steel. This system was required up to Sept. 30, 1915. I should note that, besides these photos, I have never seen any of these early Florida pioneer plates. I have seen other similar "leather" plates from other states – both with and without the applicable state name being identified. In fact, I have never seen a photograph of a car with these homemade Florida plates. While some sources mention the "paper certificate", the State issued round discs (about the size of a half dollar) with the registration numbers. I understand that these were to be nailed to the dashboard. The L2938 plate in made of leather.



**COUNTY PLATES:** On Jul. 5, 1911, a law was passed for the licensing of motor vehicles by each county in addition to the continued licensing with the Secretary of State. On this date only 48 of Florida's present counties were in existence. The first county issuance appears to have started on Oct. 1, 1911. The first unified Florida plate was issued in 1918. Prior to 1918 each county and in some locations cities issued plates. The majority of these were porcelain plates. Some were as small as 2" by 4" with the majority of them being around 4" by 6". Most, if not all, counties issued plates. Some cities issued their own plates – Jacksonville, Fernandina, Miami, Pensacola, Palatka, Ocala, Orlando, Brooksville, and Tampa. Here are a few examples:





1910 (First year Jax plate)

1910 – 1911

1911 – 1912



1912 – 1913

1913 – 1914

1914 - 1915



1915 -1916

1916 – 1917



1914 Lee Co.





There was a time when the State issued a 2" in diameter "Motor Vehicle Title Certificate Plate". These were made in both aluminum and sheet metal. It appears that these would have been attached some how to the vehicle – probably nailed to a wood dash or riveted to sheet metal. Amazingly, these are common today. They may have been issued during the period of the "County Plate" system. On-line references attribute them to the time period of 1910 – 1920 and others say 1920 – 1930.



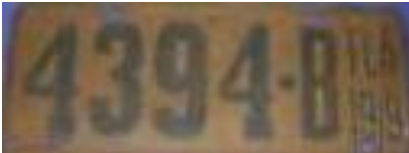
**FIRST SERIES OF STATE PLATES (1918 – 1937):** This first series of plates, up through 1937, lacked some degree of uniformity, especially in size. For these early years they ranged from 14-7/8" x 5-7/8" to 16" x 7-1/8". In 1918 the passenger car plates had a letter suffix of "B", "C", and "W" of which the "C" seems to have been the most common. The "C" was for cars; however, in the later 1930's the "C" was dropped – probably because it took up too much room. During this period there was an "M" prefix for dealers and an "X" for official State plates, but the colors were reversed. The use of the "M" and "X" continued in use until the early 1970's. In 1919 the plates had a letter suffix, and in 1920 it was a letter prefix. In 1919 and 1920 the letters "D", "E", and "F" were added, and these plates were used on buses, limousines, and autos for hire. The "dealer" plate in 1920 had the word "Dealer" on it with the colors reversed. The plates for 1918 through 1921 were issued in pairs. Later "G" was used for trucks.

As the numbers for a given class of plates went over a thousand digits, a "hyphen" was added; i.e., 123-456. Some people still think that a pre-1938 plate for say 7-666 was an Orange county plate, and this was not the case. It was number 7,666.

1918 (This was a flat stenciled plate)



1919



1920



1921



One on-line reference noted that in 1921 the "B" stands for 1 – 22 hp cars and the "D" stands for 28 – 35 hp cars. For 1923 through 1926 the plates had an outline of the state of Florida.

For 1922 through 1925 most of the plates had one or more slots for weight and / or capacity tabs. In 1923 the letter "G" was added for the trucks. As for the tabs, they seem to have ranged from 1500 lbs to 4000 lbs. Trucks

and limousines had 2 slots. One was designated for “Weight” and the other for “Cap’y” (i.e., capacity) such as “6 Pas”. The word for “Dealer” returned in 1926, but this time it was vertical lettering on the left side of the plate. In 1925 a trailer plate with an “N” was added. There was a “K” and possibly other letters used in 1925.

1922



1923



1924



The “C” tab, generally referred to as a passenger car, is #1500 pounds. There could be different tabs for other weights.

1925



1926



1927



1928





1929



1930

Beginning in 1930 and up through 1955 the size of Florida plates was set at 5-1/8" x 11-7/8". For 1930 and 1931 all passenger car plates had only digits. When over 3 digits they were separated with a dash (i.e., 123-456 implying 123,456). Trucks had the vertical word "Truck" on the left side while other commercial plates were identified across the top with "For Hire", "Trailer", "Dealer", and "Official".



1931



1932



1933



1934 & 1935

In 1934 and 1935 there were locking tab types referred to as the "burglar-proof" tags. These tags had various letters for classes. The "Official" (i.e., "X") and the "Dealer" (i.e., "M") plates did not have the locking tabs. In 1936 there was a special issue of "Army" and "Navy" plates. The "T" was used in this period for passenger cars;

however, in 1933 only the “T” was used for “Trucks”; The “W” could have been a heavy car; The “X” is probably a State vehicle. Note that the truck tag below (GK15674) has an incorrect “W” weight tab.



No indication of what the “A” stands for:



1936



1937



**SECOND SERIES OF STATE PLATES (1938 - 1975):** This second series of plates standardized the format that was used up to the plate dated 1975. The 1975 plate received a sticker in 1976 and were used up through 1980. The “Alpha – Numeric” plate style started in April 1977, and up into 1980 this “Second Series” of plates existed in use along with the newer “Alpha – Numeric” plates.

A statewide census was taken in 1935, and from this, county prefix numbers were assigned to the plates. At the time the state population was around 1,613,000. Some references note this as a census of 1937. I am sure that there were special Florida censuses in both 1935 and 1945. The County numbers were as follows:

1 Dade	11 Alachua	21 Gadsden	31 Suwannee
2 Duval	12 Lake	22 Putnam	32 Indian River
3 Hillsborough	13 Leon	23 Bay	33 Santa Rosa
4 Pinellas	14 Marion	24 St. Lucie	34 DeSoto
5 Polk	15 Manatee	25 Jackson	35 Madison
6 Palm Beach	16 Sarasota	26 Osceola	36 Walton
7 Orange	17 Seminole	27 Highlands	37 Taylor
8 Volusia	18 Lee	28 Pasco	38 Monroe
9 Escambia	19 Brevard	29 Columbia	39 Levy
10 Broward	20 St. Johns	30 Hardee	40 Hernando

41 Nassau	49 Hendry	57 Okeechobee	65 Wakulla
42 Martin	50 Washington	58 Calhoun	66 Gulf
43 Okaloosa	51 Holmes	59 Franklin	67 Liberty
44 Sumter	52 Baker	60 Glades	68 Office Agency
45 Bradford	53 Charlotte	61 Flagler	90 Duplicates
46 Jefferson	54 Dixie	62 Lafayette	
47 Citrus	55 Gilchrist	63 Union	
48 Clay	56 Hamilton	64 Collier	

As for the above "68" plates, these were issued by the tag office in Tallahassee and were often associated with state officials, policemen, and certain VIP's; however, citizens could order their plates from Tallahassee if they desired. In some years the normal "X" prefix was changed to the "68" prefix. The last use of the "90" was in 1973. As for the "X" prefix on the black-on-yellow state plates it was dropped in 1961 and went to a consecutive state wide numerical series.

The tag agencies of all states have what are called "Sample Plates" –



The wartime issue in 1943 was an embossed metal tab used on the 1942 base plate. There were no 1943 dated plates.

The letter classifications that followed the county numbers were as follows, and this is based mainly on my memory so there may be errors and omissions:

"T" - - Passenger car (weights under 2000 lbs). This "T" tag was discontinued in 1961. It wasn't used on many vehicles except a light Ford Model "T" or an Isetta.



"D" - - Passenger car - - Up through 1947 this was used for weights 2501 lbs – 3000 lbs.



"D" - - Passenger car - After 1948, this was used for weights 2001 lbs – 2500 lbs



Plain (No letters) - - Passenger car - - Up through 1947 this was used for weights 2001 lbs – 2500 lbs; also note the hyphen for digits in the thousands. The use of the hyphen was used only in 1938.





Plain (No letters) - - Passenger car - - Starting in 1948 this was used for weights 2501 lbs – 3500 lbs because there were now more heavy cars. The removal of the “D” allowed for an additional digit.



“W” - - Passenger car (3501 lbs – 4500 lbs)



“WW” - - Passenger car (over 4501 lbs) - When counties reached 100,000 plates in this classification they went to the “fractional” combination of “WW”. In Broward Co. the “fractional” 10 over “W” and then the 10 over “W-over-W” was used.



“Q” - - Antique Plate for passenger cars only - - This “Q” classification was offered after WW II for all cars over 20 years old; trucks not included. At the time it was not considered an “antique” tag but was a special tag for “old people” who had cars over 20 years old. The tag cost was \$5, and the car had to include its original engine – i.e., no hot rods. In fact the application process required that a Florida State Trooper verify the motor number. Prior to 1955 there were no VIN numbers, and all Florida titles listed the motor number. This is still the case in Florida today for pre-1955 vehicles. This “antique” tag continued for the years after the start of the alpha-numeric, but it was only apparent in the cost of the tag.



“B” - - Boat Trailer (Private Trailer)



“B/B” - - Private Light Trailer (501 - 1050 lbs)



“C” - - City Bus



“C/V” - - Commercial vehicle (truck) (over 2000 lbs)



“DC” - - Department of Correction



“E” - - Taxi cabs / rental cars / Limousines



“F” - - Unknown “F”; Since this is a 68 (i.e., Office Agency for the State of Florida), it may apply to state agency.



“FO” - - Trailer for hire - - These are half year plates. These held an expiration date. For the 1960's and earlier the colors are reversed. (More than 4001 lbs)



“FMP” - - Florida Marine Patrol



“G” - - Commercial Truck (less than 2050 lbs)



“GF” - - Truck for hire



“GFH” - - Truck for hire, but I think it’s a half year plate (prob. a pre-WWII version)



“GH” - - Private Truck (2051 lbs – 3050 lbs) (Some incorrectly call this a commercial plate.)



“GK” - - Private Truck (3051 lbs – 5050 lbs) (Some incorrectly call this a commercial plate.)



“GL” - - Probably a truck (over 5050 lbs)



“GW” - - Truck (over 5050 lbs); Heavy Equipment – Power shovels, cranes, etc. (These appeared in the late 1960?)



“H” - - Half year plates - - In the period of the county number system you could buy a half year plate which covered the month of July through December. This was a cost saver for someone purchasing a vehicle during the last half of a year. Shortly after the early 1950’s this plate went away, but you could still purchase a half year plate but you received a normal plate.





“HF” - - Truck for hire (over 4051 lbs) – Also, identified as a Half year semi – trailer.



“HFH” - - Half Year Truck for Hire (Colors reversed)



“H / T” - - House Trailer



“HIC” - - House Investigation Committee



“IB” - - Unknown



“K” - - Ambulance



“K/A” - - Fractional Ambulance - - This was used only in 1949.



“L” - - Semi-trailer



“MC” - - Member of Congress



“M” - - Dealer - - The colors are reversed on the dealer plates; however, the 1965 was the first year of the “Non-reversed” colors.



“MI” - - Independent Dealer - - “MI”, “MF”, & “MT” replaced the “M” series in 1965 and the use of reversed colors was dropped.



“MF” - - Franchised Dealer



“MT” - - Franchised Truck Dealer



“MH” - - Mobile Home - - These mobile homes were taxed as vehicles and not as real estate. There was a later Real Property “RP” plate that were put on Mobile Homes that had been converted to a fixed asset and taxed along with the land. They were undated with various colors and would have numbers such as 473RP8, 1345RP42, etc. The last “RP” digits denote the county number.



“N” - - Rental Trailer (over 2000 lbs)



“NN” - - Rental trailer (under 2000 lbs)



“N/T” - - Don't know what this was used on

(Photo Needed)

“O” - - Semi-trailer for hire (These appeared with the “O” in the middle around 1962; i.e., 49-O-123)



“P” - - Off-road vehicle / Harvest truck (Picker)



“Beverage Vehicle” - - This a rare plate for 1941 & 1942. I have never seen another one like it.



“RB” - - Ringling Brothers



“RV” - - Recreational Vehicle





"S" - - Bus for hire



"TA – TE" - - Truck tractor



"TAF – TEF" - - Half-year Truck Tractor



"TB" & "TD" - - Unknown



"V" - - Private Trailer less than 500 lbs. Probably a utility of some sort.



"X" - - Tax exempt; non profit, exempt - - There was a private version of this plate that changed yearly, but there were no county numbers. There was a blue on yellow and later a blue on black (?) version were used by local governmental agencies.



This 68X plate is a sheriff plate.



During 1938, the first year of this series, some – if not all - of these letter designators, such as the “M”, “GH”, etc., were placed before the county number. Also, in 1938 the plates in the “thousand digits” used a hyphen (i.e., 2D-1-234). In 1939 this hyphen was eliminated, and this would have been 2D-1234. In 1939 the letters followed the county numbers. In the case of the dealer plates the colors were reversed up through at least 1960. Compare a 1960 dealer plate against the normal run of plates:



Regarding the above “N”, “B”, and “V” plates, I find it amazing that car collectors would use these plates for their “Year of Manufacture” registrations. It’s really funny to see a big 1958 Cadillac with a boat trailer tag.

There were plates without the county numbers such as:

Army



“DV” for Disabled Veteran



Seminole and Miccosukee



Foreign Consul



National Guard



Motor Vehicle Commission



Public Service Commission



Railroad Utility Commission



Radio amateur (First year 1950)



U.S. State Senator



Convention (Shriner, etc.)



Maintenance (NOTE: Don't know what this was used for; colors are reversed.)



Handicap



Florida Highway Patrol





Sheriff c1970



State Road Department



Florida Crime Prevention Commission (Age unknown)



Bridge Plates



In 1949 the slogan "Sunshine State" was added. In 1951 it was replaced for one year with "Keep Florida Green" and in 1965 with "400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary".



An interesting event occurred in 1950 – the tag plant burned down. As a result, the State of Florida contracted with the Georgia prison facility for the majority of the 1951 run, and that is why the 1951 plates have round holes and not rectangular slots. A 1951 plate with rectangular slots is rare. All 1952 tags had round holes also. Here is a 1951 Dealer plate with a slot.



In 1956 the State adopted the national standard of 6" x 12" size that remains to this day. As noted above, prior to 1956 the size of plates was 5-1/8" x 11-7/8". With the increase in the required digits some plates were increased to 12-7/8" in length to accommodate the added digits such as below.

In 1958 the Horseless Carriage plate was adopted for all collector vehicles over 35 years of age, and they were not to be used for daily transportation. This legislation was spear headed by Jerry Foley of Jacksonville. In the late '50's I used to stop by his big gated home on the St. John's River. When he was to be seen in the yard, I'd get his attention so he'd show me his cars. He was fortunate to receive numbers 1 through 10 for his fantastic collection. In 1958 and 1959 these plates were renewed yearly and used the color scheme for those years. In 1960 it became a permanent plate with white on red. In December, 1962 I made application for the Horseless Carriage plate on my 1928 Model "A" Ford – number 311. Of course, I considered her as a collector car, but I drove her anyway. I still have her with the HC 311 plate.



In the 1950's the tag agencies came out and provided booster plates for the front of the car. All they did was advertise Florida and could probably be had for a dollar or so. The colors matched the year of the plates issued, and there were a limited number of years that these were offered:



Until 1964 all plates were purchased in the month of December for the following year. Can you imagine how over bearing that would be today? In 1964, in an effort to shift the tag expense off the Christmas season, a 13 month plate system was put in place. The 1964 plate was used in the calendar year 1964 and expired on Feb. 20, 1965. The 1965 plate expired on Mar. 31, 1966. The 1966 plate expired on Apr. 30, 1967. The next four years were split years of 67/68, 68/69, 69/70, and 70/71. The 1972 plate was issued on Jul. 1, 1971 and expired on Aug. 20, 1972. This was the start of the use of a reflective cream colored plastic sheet bonded to the steel and later to the aluminum sheet stock. The blanks were then embossed with the raised letters / numbers which were then painted. In July 1975 a "76" sticker was issued to revalidate the 1975 base-plate, and monthly expiration stickers were issued beginning in July 1976. Stickers on the 1975 base plate continued to be used into at least 1980. There was an overlap in the use of "County Numbered" plates and the new "Alpha-Numeric" plates that started in April 1977. Prior to 1972 the renewal of plates occurred at the same time for everyone (that being June 1972), but after that date, the month of expiration depended on the registrant's birth month for privately owned vehicles. This spread the yearly distribution of plates across the calendar instead of everyone renewing in the same month. Up to about 1975 these plates were registered to the "car" and not the "owner". If you sold your car, the plate went with it, and the new owner got your plate. After 1975 or so, the plate went with the "owner". You bought a new car; you used your old plate. Of course, the State managed to double charge you for it with fees.

All Florida plates were made of steel until 1974 when aluminum plates were put into production. Early on there was no logic to the quantity of aluminum versus steel used on these plates. Looking at the plate numbers reveals that steel plates were used and then aluminum and then back to steel. In 1975 about 1% of the plates were still being made of steel. I found a single c1974 plate that was hot-dipped galvanized sheet steel.

During the 1950's vanity plates were available on the standard yearly base plate, but I do not know when they were instituted. My father had SIMPERS on the family car. Also, in the 1950's and up to the end of the county numbered plate, you could reserve special numbers. I remembered my father holding 2-1164 for years – this being a Duval County plate and the 1164 being our street address. Some people reserved the same low number year after year.

**COLORS:** The following are the colors of the Florida plates. Where there are 2 combinations listed, this is because different references call the colors differently.

1918	White on black	1947	White on green
1919	Black on golden yellow (orange)	1948	Yellow on black
1920	Red on gray	1949	Red on cream
1921	White on brown	1950	Blue on orange
1922	White on green	1951	Green on bright yellow (yellow)
1923	Orange on blue (dark blue)	1952	Orange on blue
1924	White on black	1953	Blue on orange
1925	Orange on green	1954	Orange on blue
1926	Golden yellow (yellow) on black	1955	Blue on orange
1927	Ivory of black	1956	White on blue
1928	Golden yellow (yellow) on maroon	1957	Blue on white
1929	Orange on blue	1958	White on dark green
1930	White on green	1959	Dark blue on white
1931	White on maroon	1960	Pale yellow on blue
1932	Orange on black	1961	Blue on yellow
1933	Black on orange	1962	Blue on white
1934	White on black	1963	White on blue
1935	Black on yellow	1964	Blue on orange
1936	White on maroon (red)	1965	Refl. Golden yellow on Spanish red
1937	White on green	1966	Refl. White on blue
1938	Golden yellow (yellow) on black	67/68	Refl. White on black
1939	Red on white	68/69	Refl. White on red
1940	White on black	69/70	Refl. White on green
1941	Red on white	70/71	Refl. White on blue
1942	Orange on blue	1972	Red-orange on refl. white
1943	Yellow on blue metal tab	1973	Green on refl. white
1944	Black on yellow	1974	Red-orange on refl. white
1945	Yellow on black	1975	Red-orange on refl. white
1946	White on dark blue	1976	1975 base w/ white on green sticker



1 Dade



2 Duval



3 Hillsborough



4 Pinellas



5 Polk



6 Palm Beach



7 Orange



8 Volusia



9 Escambia



10 Broward



11 Alachua



12 Lake



13 Leon



14 Marion



15 Manatee



16 Sarasota



17 Seminole



18 Lee



19 Brevard



20 St. Johns



21 Gadsden



22 Putnam



23 Bay



24 St. Lucie



25 Jackson



26 Osceola



27 Highlands



28 Pasco



29 Columbia



30 Hardee



31 Suwannee



32 Indian River



33 Santa Rosa



34 DeSoto



35 Madison



36 Walton



37 Taylor



38 Monroe



39 Levy



40 Hernando



41 Nassau



42 Martin



43 Okaloosa



44 Sumter



45 Bradford



46 Jefferson



47 Citrus



48 Clay



49 Hendry



50 Washington



51 Holmes



52 Baker



53 Charlotte



54 Dixie





55 Gilchrist



56 Hamilton



57 Okeechobee



58 Calhoun



59 Franklin



60 Glades



61 Flagler



62 Lafayette



63 Union



64 Collier



65 Wakulla



66 Gulf



67 Liberty



68 Office Agency



90 Duplicates (Issued out of Tallahassee)



**THIRD SERIES OF STATE PLATES (1977 - current):** Beginning in Apr. 1977, Florida began issuing alpha-numeric license plates and also expanded greatly the number of special vanity plates. With that the county number system and the weight classifications disappeared. What followed after that is another story for someone else to describe in detail.

**NOTE:** This Document History:

1. An early and shorter version of this document, without the photographs, was printed in the AACCC *Nuts and Bolts* in June 2010;
2. In late 2010 a version without photos was printed in a local Hudson club publication;
3. Sometime around 2012 or 2013 a version was posted on the Antique Automobile Club of Cape Canaveral / Canaveral Region AACA website;
4. On Sept. 18, 2015 an updated version was provided for: (1) the AACA publication *Sidelights* in south Florida; (2) the AACCC editor Joe Pinson for publication in the *Nuts and Bolts*; and (3) to the AACCC / Canaveral Region webmaster for up dating of the website version; and
5. On March 5, 2020 M.R. Simpers shared this document with the Webmaster of the Antique Automobile Club of Cape Canaveral, also known as the Canaveral Region of the Antique Automobile Club of America, with full permission to post it on the Club's website.