



# Evolution of Illinois License Plates

JESSE WHITE • Secretary of State

When Illinois adopted its first motor vehicle licensing law in 1907, it was not license plates issued by the state, but rather round, aluminum registration seals. Each 2" seal was stamped with a number and cost \$2. Vehicle owners often attached these to their vehicle's wooden dashboards.

From 1907 to 1910, vehicle owners were required to display the registration number from the aluminum seal on both the front and rear of their vehicles. Because the state did not distribute plates at the time, many vehicle owners turned to blacksmiths and machinists to make the plates. The plates had to be 4" high, with the letters "ILL" set at 1" high. Numbers and letters were black on a white background.

When the Secretary of State's office began issuing license plate in 1911, the plates did not show the year. Fees for the plates ranged from \$4 to \$10, depending on a vehicle's horsepower. In 1912, the current practice of displaying the current year began.

The size of Illinois license plates has varied over the years. From 1911 to 1915, plates were approximately 7" high, with the length dictated by how many digits were in the license number. The width of the plate was reduced to 5" in 1916, 4" in 1922 and back to 5" in 1934, before a standard 6" x 12" plates was adopted in 1956. This standard plate size was consistent with other state license plates and is still used today.

Materials used also have changed. Though plates traditionally have been made of steel or aluminum, a metal shortage during World War II caused license plate manufacturers to use a fiberboard material from 1943 to 1948. From 1912 to 1918, the front plates were alternately perforated, cut out and slotted to allow air to pass through to a vehicle's motor.

The most varied element of the Illinois license plate is its color. Plate colors have ranged from orange and black in 1927, to red, white and blue in 1976, to the palette of colors used today on an array of specialty license plates.

Plates also have had three special designs over the years. In 1927, the letters "ILL" and the numbers "27" were embossed in a small outline of the state on the

right-hand side of the plate. In 1968, two small "1800s" appeared in the plate's upper corners, commemorating the sesquicentennial of Illinois' admission to the union in 1818. The third design, in honor of the 1976 bicentennial, consisted of lateral red stripes and 13 blue stars in two arcs above and below the plate number.

"Land of Lincoln" – our official state slogan – was added to Illinois license plates in 1954, and a reflective coating for nighttime safety was added in 1966.

A straight numerical numbering system was used until 1961. That year, as the result of a University of Illinois College of Engineering study, a two-letter, four-digit system was adopted for all numbers above 999,999. Various combinations of letters and numbers were authorized in the following years.

Vanity plates, consisting of four to six letters, were issued for the first time in 1980, and seven-letter vanity plates became available in 1984. These special plates come with an additional "vanity" fee and are still available today. Personalized plated – those with letters and numbers – also are available.

Multi-year plates and annual renewal stickers were first issued in 1979 for an anticipated five-year period. The life of those plates was extended to 10 years.

New multi-year plates with a new design were introduced in 1983.

For the first time in more than 17 years, Illinois license plates are undergoing another transformation. Secretary of State Jesse White announced his plan to replat the state's estimated 10 million vehicles by the year 2026. The new red, white and blue plate featuring Illinois icon Abraham Lincoln and elements of Illinois began appearing in 2017.



# ILLINOIS LICENSE PLATE COLOR COMBINATIONS

## 1911 - present

<u>Year</u>	<u>Background</u>	<u>Numbers</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Background</u>	<u>Numbers</u>
1911	White	Black	1948	Orange	Black
1912	Black	White	1949	Dark Blue	Yellow
1913*			1950	Off White	Ivy Green
1914	White	Green			
1915	Yellow	Blue	1951	Aluminum	Maroon
			1952	Burnt Orange	Midnight Blue
1916	Aluminum	Black	1953	Buff	Ruby Red
1917	Black	White	1954	Emerald Green	White
1918	Grey	Dark Blue	1955	Blue	Orange
1919	Brown	White			
1920	Orange	Black	1956	Grey	Green
			1957	Red	White
1921	Black	White	1958	White	Purple
1922	Grey	Black	1959	Brown	White
1923	Green	White	1960	Royal Blue	Gold
1924	Black	Yellow			
1925	Brown	White	1961	Cardinal Red	White
			1962	Orange	White
1926	Blue	White	1963	Green	Yellow
1927	Orange	Black	1964	Purple	White
1928	Maroon	White	1965	White	Green
1929	Black	Red			
1930	Black	White	1966	White	Maroon
			1967	White	Black
1931	Green	Black	1968	White	Red
1932	Blue	Yellow	1969	Orange	Dark Blue
1933	Blue	White	1970	Yellow	Red
1934	Black	Yellow			
1935	Light Grey	Dark Blue	1971	White	Black
			1972	White	Blue
1936	Black	White	1973	White	Green
1937	Yellow	Black	1974	White	Red
1938	Green	White	1975	Yellow	Black
1939	Black	Yellow			
1940	Coffee	Cream	1976	White, Red	Blue
			1977	White	Green
1941	Orange	Black	1978	White	Black
1942	Black	Orange	1979	White	Blue
1943	Green	White			
1944	Coffee	Cream	1983	Blue, White	Dark Blue
1945	Black	Orange			
			2001	Blue, White	Red
1946	Maroon	White			
1947	Green	Ivory	2017	Blue, White	Red

\* The front 1913 plate was a stenciled plate. Numbers and letters were painted white on the license plate frame. The back plate had a blue background with embossed white characters.