

History of the New Mexico License Plate

- New Mexico became the 47th state in the Union on January 6, 1912.



- The first license plate design had prominent numbers on a solid color and "NM" and the year of issue stamped on the right. The style begun in 1912 continued, with color changes each year, through 1919.

- License plates changed colors each year, from 1912 to 1965 when the state adopted yellow only for the background color.



- New Mexico was first spelled out in 1927, the same year the state added the Zia symbol to its license plate.

- The year of issue was displayed prominently, from 1912 to mid-1970, sometimes on one side of the plate, sometimes inside the Zia symbol.



- In 1932, the state issued a green license plate with bold, white numbers, a decorative Zia symbol in the center, and the words "Sunshine State" at the bottom. The abbreviation "New Mex" was printed with the year of issue on one side.

- After Director of the State Tourist Bureau Joe Bursey used the phrase "Land of Enchantment" in a 1935 brochure, he persuaded then-Governor John Miles to add it to New Mexico license plates.



- "The Land of Enchantment" first appeared on license plates in 1941 and has been on them ever since.



- Though the letters USA first appeared on the 47th state's license plates in 1965, they were not permanent fixtures until around 1990 when USA became standard on license plates.

- Until early 1970 only numbers were used on New Mexico license plates. Letters were added as more and more New Mexicans could afford automobiles.



- New Mexico license plates are the "yellow" plate, introduced in 1980, and the "balloon" plate, introduced in 2000 and destined to be discontinued January 2010.



- Described as retro, the "Centennial 1912–2012" license plate is definitely classic. It incorporates yellow and red from the New Mexico state flag, the Zia, and a shade of turquoise evocative of the Southwest.

- New Mexico residents will decide in a survey whether to replace the "yellow" plate with the "Centennial" plate, or to keep them both as standard state-issued license plates.