

# MORETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## THIS ISSUE- AUTOMOBILE REGISTRATION



Addie Sawyer, of Moretown with her new 1912 Ford. The automobile was slow to arrive in the valley, rough terrain and wild winter's made horses a much more reliable source of dependable travel. Although there was talk of running a railroad through the valley it never happened and that may be a good thing. Once cars took prominence many businesses were discontinued, such as the blacksmith, the carriage menders and stables. However there were still many instances when the new fangled cars and trucks had to be pulled out of the mire by the dependable horse or oxen.



From Vermont Auto Club Book of 1915, registrations from Moretown.

Registration number	Name	Auto
1233	J. W. Bates	Studebaker
5415	Addie Sawyer	Chevrolet
9085	May Ward	Cadillac
1448	S.E. Atkins	Studebaker
3338	Walter Child	Ford
1749	George Farnham	Buick
3968	Edwin Foster	Ford
2475	Frank Hathaway	Studebaker

### **A History of Vermont License Plates, 1894-1950**

In 1904, the Legislature passed Vermont's first registration law. This act required that all automobiles be registered with the Secretary of State on or before May 1, 1905. It is not known for sure if the state issued license plates at this time or whether the owner provided his own plates. However, soon after May 1, 1905, the state was issuing white on blue enameled iron plates bearing the words "Vermont Automobile Register" and the number assigned to the vehicle. This number was also to be displayed on the lights of the vehicle at night.

The first registration law produced a total of 373 registrations. All vehicles were registered without regard to the type of vehicle, with the exception of dealers.

In 1906 the Legislature passed an act which included the first explicit provision for uniform plates provided by the state. These plates were to be made of enameled iron at least six by eleven inches, white surfaced with a black margin on  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch and contain the letters "VT", two inches high with  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch stroke.

In 1908 a new law requiring the registration of vehicles be on an annual basis. As a result the plates were dated for the first time, the date being placed under the letters "VT". The automobile owner could, with the permission of the Secretary of State paint the number of his vehicle on the radiator instead of attaching the front license plate.

In 1912, the design of the plates were modified. The spacing of the numbers was reduced and the date and "VT" were moved, one to each end of the plate vertically.

In June 1913 there had been 4,538 cars registered compared with 373 just eight years before.

The year 1916 saw a major change in the license plates themselves as this was the first year of pressed steel plates. Before this, the plates had been made by out of state companies specializing in enameled iron work. These new steel plates were of basically the same design, only the color was left to the option of the Secretary of State, so long as there was a marked contrast between the background and the numbers. These plates were also required to be of a different color each year. Apparently it was felt the difference in colors each year was sufficient to tell the plates apart, as the years 1916, 1917 and 1918 were not dated. However, these plates could be distinguished from one another even if they had no paint remaining on them, as different dyes were used for stamping them. The 1917 plates had flatter, wider numbers than the other years, and the 1916 plates had larger slots in the top than the 1918 plates.

In 1919, the date appeared on the plates again. During this same year, the Legislature reduced the size of the plates to 12"x4 5/8", with 3" numbers and a 5.8" stroke, 1/2" apart to become effective with the 1920 registration year. After 1921 the plates were required to be at least 14" from the ground and fastened so they didn't swing.

In 1923 there were approximately 60,000 vehicles registered.

The first use of a slogan on Vermont plates came about in 1948 with the addition of "Green Mountains". These plates had originally been scheduled to be black and white, but the Commissioner decided, perhaps because of the slogan, to change to green and gold. The "Green Mountains" slogan was used through 1950, and the present green and white combination was started in 1949.

(It is interesting to note that in 1915 the #1 plate was issued to C.C. Warren from Waterbury, but by 1939 plates numbered 1-100 were assigned by the Executive Office as were 101A-200A. Do you have an old Vermont auto registration plate and wonder who owned it or what kind of car they drove? We have access to that information from the years 1915, 1939 and 1940. Would be happy to look up who the car owner was and what they were driving)!

#### **Acknowledgements:**

1. *Agency of Transportation- Dept. of Motor Vehicle Dept web site*
2. *Much of this report through the 1950's was taken from a term paper written by, then UVM undergraduate, Gary Irish of Jericho, Vermont.*
3. *Private collection*



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How about “Drawing Logs from Dowsville” a book by Mary Gow and Kitty Werner which includes the history of the Ward Lumber Co. and lots of great pictures and other local history? (\$30.00 or \$15.00)

There is also a pamphlet of POETRY written by Moretown folks and compiled by Earline Marsh. (\$12.00)

A work by Earline Marsh on the history of the Taplin School and more. (\$18.00)

OR we also have two little booklets one written by Lydia Billings (1963) and one by Mary Reagan, (1982) which outline the history of MORETOWN (\$3.00 for one or both for \$5.00)

Please contact Mary at the Moretown Historical Society for ordering or more information. 496-2901 or [MMurphy917@aol.com](mailto:MMurphy917@aol.com)