



Dragon estimates this **porcelain enamel plate** dates to 1913. The District started requiring drivers to register vehicles in 1903, he says. At first residents made their own tags, but in 1907 they were required to buy license plates.



During World War II, the government limited how much metal could be used for license plates. As a result, states and the District made validation tags, such as the **1944 tab** on its original plate, Dragon says.

A plate commemorates President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1965 inaugural parade. **Parade plates** are issued in order of procession, starting with number 1 for the presidential limo.



This 1968 plate features an obvious **error**. Normally plates with printing errors are scrapped, Dragon says, but are sometimes accidentally issued.



In the early 20th century, if you lived in the District and often drove in Maryland, "you had to be registered in both places," Dragon says. He bolted together these **1923 D.C. and Maryland plates** as an example of what was required of drivers.

Cars in the annual Cherry Blossom Festival parade were issued plates from 1962 to 1974. This **cardboard plate** dates to 1969.

This 1974 plate celebrating the nation's upcoming bicentennial was the first to feature the general design used today: blue text, white background and red rules.

The **"D.C. Wants to Vote" strip** is not original to the plate, but Dragon compared its coloring and the location of its bolt slots to try to deduce which plate (and time period) corresponds with the strip.

Tagging D.C. history

Collector focuses on city license plates

BY KRIS CORONADO

When Richard Dragon comes to Washington, he doesn't mind the traffic. He revels in it. It's an opportunity, the 50-year-old accountant says, to observe what he most enjoys acquiring — D.C. license plates — in real time. "That's one of the things about license plates: There's always stuff to look at," he says. "I subconsciously look at every plate."

Dragon, who lives in Warwick, R.I., has been collecting license plates since he was 8. He estimates that he has collected more than 15,000 license plates, with at least 2,000 related to

the District. A member of the Automobile License Plate Collectors Association, he visits the D.C. area at least once a year to meet fellow collectors and to conduct research. Dragon's interest in D.C. plates began after he bought a large collection in 2001. Seeking to add to the set, Dragon soon realized the scarcity of plates from the nation's capital — the Federal Highway Administration reports that 238,504 vehicles were registered in D.C. in 2011, as opposed to the 125 million nationwide — and that finding information on their history was even more difficult. He has

been trying to fill that void.

Today, Dragon is a homespun expert on the subject: In 2006, he launched a Web site (*dcplates.net*), which compiles photos and research he and a dozen fellow D.C. plate enthusiasts have gathered. "My holy grail is if somebody calls me up and says, 'My grandfather worked at the DMV in 1935, and I have this book of data,'" Dragon says. Here, he shares some of his most intriguing finds.