

Written by Scott Trudeau
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Christopher Garrish of Penticton is celebrating the release of his book, *Tales from the Back Bumper: A History of B.C. Licence Plates*. The two plates in the middle have the number 12741 and are rare finds.

A master's degree thesis about the Okanagan fruit industry for a Penticton man branched off into a book that chronicles the history of B.C. licence plates.

Christopher Garrish's book is called *Tales from the Back Bumper: A History of B.C. Licence Plates*.

Garrish said he'd never planned to write a book about an ordinary, everyday subject but while conducting his research, which involved sifting through library archives and viewing reels of microfilm, he decided to investigate how much information was available about licence plates.

It turns out there was quite a bit including readily accessible records from the Motor Vehicle Branch from 1904 to 1955.

He continued gathering as much data as possible, investing about three years in getting to the stage where it could become a book. Along the way, he drew upon the knowledge from several licence plate collectors.

Then Garrish began exploring publishing houses he thought might have an interest in the topic.

Although he received many letters of rejection, one company, - Heritage House - expressed an interest in putting a book together. The book was published this year.

In chapter one, Garrish gives readers an account of what is believed to be the first appearance of licence plates in 17th-century Europe. He also writes about how the earliest plates in B.C. were made from porcelain, and how others were made from an assortment of materials: rubber, leather, wood and canvas.

Chapter five covers the emergence of vanity plates, which dates back several decades, when a desire for specific numbers created a demand and a competition for plates. One of those plates people wanted featured the number 1. That number was used in B.C. until the mid 1950s when letters started to show up.

B.C.'s first vanity plate, "Healey" was issued in 1979 to Austin-Healey owner Richard Rogers of White Rock.

The chapter also has pictures of some of the vanity plates that were either rejected or recalled, as well as plates that were once allowable, but would be prohibited today.

Garrish said he's pleased with Chapter six, titled *The Cost of Province Building*, because the material was dry and contained information of interest mostly to collectors.

In the final run, he was able to transform that material into something that was interesting and informative.

"I was proud of that," said Garrish.

Several of the plates loaned to him by collectors are directly connected to Penticton. Among them is a B.C. plate with the number 12741. It belonged to Penticton citizen Cyrus W. Kinney (for whom Kinney Avenue is named) and was originally issued to Kinney in 1917 and is a rare

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and valuable find.

The foreword of the book was written by Gordon Campbell, former B.C. premier and currently the High Commissioner for Canada to the United Kingdom.

Garrish will also be selling copies at the Automotive Swap Meet hosted by the South Okanagan and Okanagan chapters of the Vintage Car Club on Saturday, April 20 outside the South Okanagan Events Centre.

Copies of his book are available to order on his website, BCPL8S.ca.