

Motto, Esse Quam Videri (To be rather than to seem) ^[1]



The North Carolina State Motto, "Esse Quam Videri", appearing on the plaque of the Joseph Winston Monument, Guilford Courthouse, Greensboro, N.C. Image by Marmaduke Percy, Wikimedia Commons, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

^[2]State Motto of North Carolina: Esse Quam Videri

From the *North Carolina Manual*, 2012-13.

See also: [North Carolina State Symbols and Official Adoptions main page](#) ^[3]

Translation: "To be rather than to seem."

The General Assembly of 1893 (Chapter 145) adopted the words "Esse Quam Videri" as the state's official motto. The legislators directed that these words, along with the date "20 May, 1775," be placed with North Carolina's coat of arms upon the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina. "Esse Quam Videri" means "to be rather than to seem." Nearly every U.S. state has adopted a motto, generally in Latin. North Carolina's motto is quoted from Cicero's essay on friendship (Cicero, *de Amicitia*, Chapter 26). Until the 1893 act, North Carolina had no motto. It was one of the few states which did not have a motto and the only one of the original thirteen without one.

Excerpts from original essay and translations

[De Amicitia](#) ^[4], Cicero. (Entire essay in Latin)

"The fact is that fewer people are endowed with virtue than wish to be thought to be so." [Shuckburgh translation](#) ^[5]

"...[N]ot nearly so many people want actually to be possessed of virtue as want to appear to be possessed of it." (from *On Old Age and On Friendship*, trans. by Frank Copley, Ann Arbor, U Mich. Press, 1967, p. 87).

"...[F]or the Numbers of the really virtuous are not so great, as they appear to be." (from *M. T. Cicero, His Offices*, trans. by William Guthrie, Esq., London, T. Waller, 1755, p. 317).



Great Seal of the State of North Carolina, with the Latin motto "Esse Quam Videri." Image from the North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State.

[6]

Session Laws, 1893, c. 145:

CHAPTER 145

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A STATE MOTTO

WHEREAS. Contrary to the usage of nearly all the states of the American Union the coat-of-arms and the great seal of this state bear no motto; and whereas, a suitable motto, expressive of some noble sentiment and indicative of some leading trait of our people, will be instructive as well as ornamental, and the state should also keep in perpetual remembrance the immortal declaration of independence made at Charlotte; now therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina do enact:

Section 1. That the words "*esse quam videri*" are hereby adopted as the motto of this state, and as such shall be engraved on the great seal of North Carolina and likewise at the foot of the coat-of-arms of the state as part thereof.

Sec. 2. That on the coat-of-arms, in addition to the motto at the bottom, there shall be inscribed at the top the words "May the 20th, 1775."

Sec. 3. That this act shall be in force from and after its ratification.

Ratified the 21st day of February, A.D. 1893.

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