Review By A Connoisseur Of The English Language

My favorite popular word book of the year
- William Safire, NY Times 6/22/2008

A fun, new approach to examining etymology!

Many common English words started out with an entirely different meaning than the one we know today. For example:

The word adamant came into English around 855 C.E. as a synonym for diamond, very different from today's meaning of the word: utterly unyielding in attitude or opinion.

Before the year 1200, the word silly meant blessed, and was derived from Old English saelig, meaning happy. This word went through several incarnations before adopting today's meaning: stupid or foolish.

In Semantic Antics, lexicographer Sol Steinmetz takes readers on an in-depth, fascinating journey to learn how hundreds of words have evolved from their first meaning to the meanings used today.
My Personal Review:
Who would have thought words like "nice" and "pretty" meant something completely different hundreds of years ago or that "satellite" referred to a bodyguard? In this extraordinary yet compact book, "Semantic Antics", Sol Steinmetz reviews dozens of words and how they have evolved over time. It's a simple formula...the author presents a word, gives the current and original meanings, describes from what language it is derived and often cites the word or phrase in literature.

Steinmetz begins with several different reasons why words can develop and change over time and adds to that at the end. It serves as a good set of bookends to the text within. Amelioration (upgrading of words) and pejoration (downgrading) appear most often, it seems, as the likely causes for word changes, with the latter far more prevalent. Each entry is brief but just the right length to hold the reader's interest. I highly recommend "Semantic Antics" as a terrific addition to etymology.

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