

# **The Third Side of the Coin: Book Review: Q. David Bowers' *The Waterford Water Cure***

by [Michael E. Marotta](#)  
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Once again, Mr. Bowers delivers fascinating historical details in a convenient format, thoroughly documented from original sources. The impetus for this book was a Large cent, counter-stamped "DR. SHATTUCK'S WATER CURE WATERFORD ME." Who was Dr. Shattuck? What is a water cure?

The questions actually had deep roots. Bowers was already interested in counterstamped coins and had two of Dr. Shattuck's when he read Ken Hallenbeck's article in the August 1965 issue of *The Numismatist*. That article was the first to mention the coins, among others, and with no details. Later, in 1983, Bowers was combing antique stores in Maine and happened upon the town of Waterford. In the mean time, he had the opportunity to write a book about Dr. Wilkins of Pittsfield, New Hampshire. That book also had counter-stamped coins as its seed. Immediately popular, *The Strange Career of Dr. Wilkins: a Numismatic Inquiry* led eventually to the present work.

John Jay Ford, Jr. wrote the introduction to *The Waterford Water Cure*. There is some coincidence in that and then, again, nothing is as predictable as coincidence. Ford entered numismatics as a bright lad with a paper route in 1938. He immediately memorized the contents of Adams and Woodin and made his profits peddling coins back and forth among the New York City coin stores. Back then "no one" collected Large cents. (Stack's did specialize in meeting collector needs in this area and young Ford was a favorite of the Stack's family.) In any case, "no one" wanted Large cents ruined with counterstamps. That is when John Jay Ford bought his DR. SHATTUCK'S from a junk box. It was nicely struck and pleasing, and he still has it.

This book is worth its weight in gold. What makes this book important is that it demonstrates so much of what numismatic research is all about. This book transformed the few known coins of Dr. Shattuck from unattributed mavericks into marketable rarities. Bowers did not count denticles or compare the positions of the serifs against the flowers or stars -- though these would be appropriate methods with other coins. Bowers went into the community records, the libraries, the newspapers, the deeds, the letters. He sent letters of inquiry. He interviewed people. The story of Dr. Shattuck is mildly interesting and curious. Some aspects are horrific, others merely sad. There is plain humor here. At every turn, the book opens the reader to feelings, to sharing the emotions of people long gone.

None of that would be possible or necessary without the coins. Bowers examines the numismatic evidence, of course. He also explores "water cures," even providing an astounding bibliography about them. In 200 pages, Bowers uses a numismatic curiosity to pry the lid off life 150 years ago. This book reveals to us some of the history that is so easily lost in the sifting and sorting. If you believe that coins are history you hold in your hand, and if you are interested in 19th century American history, then you deserve to own a copy of this book.