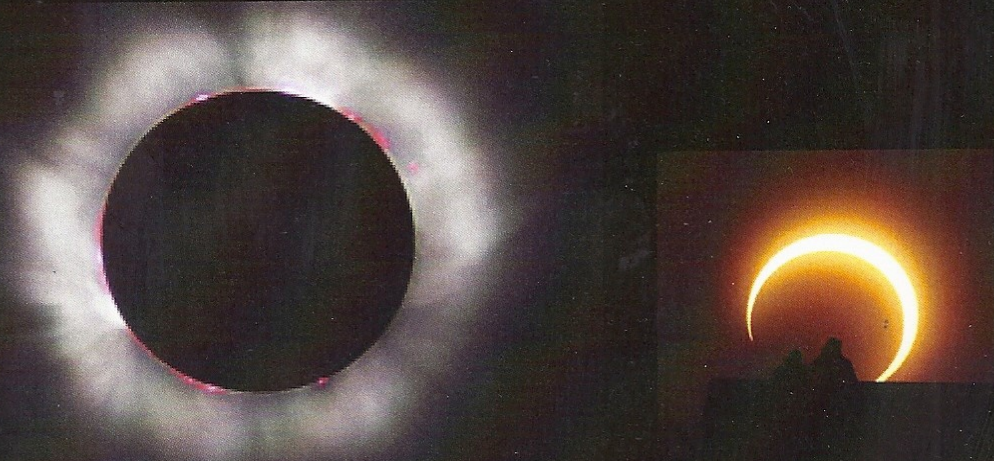
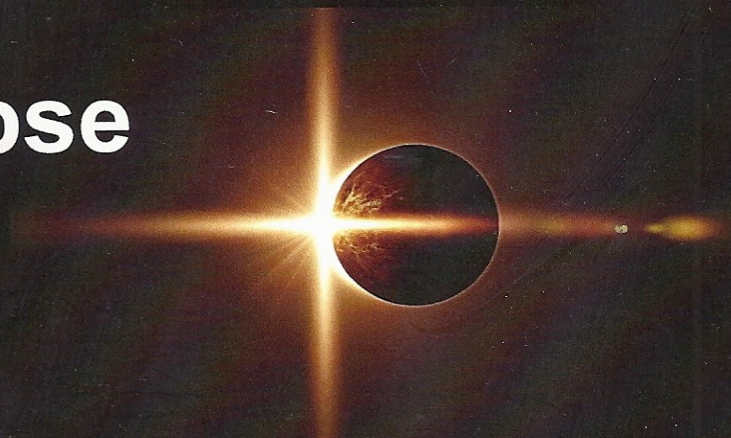


# ORBIT 17



## The Great American Eclipse



JUNE 2018

ASTRO SPACE STAMP SOCIETY

## The Scourge of the Autopen

A local dealer (and friend) recently approached me saying “Hey I have something you’ll really want” and showed me an album he had bought in The Netherlands the first part of which contained two dozen or so covers with single astronaut signatures, *writes your Editor*.

He told me he had bought the collection, showed me the receipt for 100 euros and said I could have it for that price. My eyes lit up as I looked at the crisp signatures for Young, Shepard, Slayton etc and some unusual ones like C.C.Williams and Duane Graveline. But then *caveat emptor* set in and sending some scans I consulted three people who ought to know—Bert Van Eijck, Jurgen Esders and **Umberto Cavallaro**. Umberto was keenest to help and I posted the covers to him in April

Below is his reply which contains a lot of information which you might find interesting if you have doubts about signed covers in your collection, which you did not see being signed with your very eyes. There has not been an article in *Orbit* about autopenning for around 20 years so this may be of interest to many of you in general terms.

Dear Jeff,

I’ve completed my study of the covers you sent me !

I must tell you that there are many autopen, a few “secretarial” autographs, and some that fortunately could be genuine.

Given the context it’s better to be prudent. It’s quite easy to identify autopen signatures. The main common traits are:

- *consistent line width from beginning to end, due to the unchanging pressure, i.e., uniform in thickness and pressure*
- *usually – but not always – bold and black marker*
- *they are often done in Sharpie*

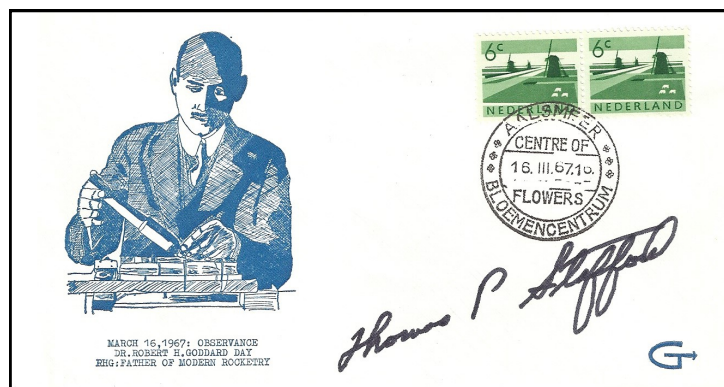
A comparison with known autopens patterns, like the one of Chris Spain (<http://www.astroautopens.com/>) or Stephen Beck (<http://www.oocities.org/~sbeck/astroap.htm>) confirms that. (Unfortunately the good resource of Craig Stadler is not online at the moment.)

Also consider that not all astronaut Autopens are created perfectly equal (intentionally or not).

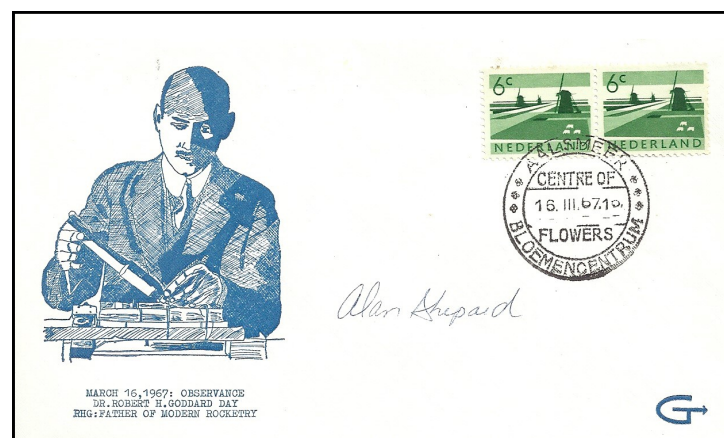
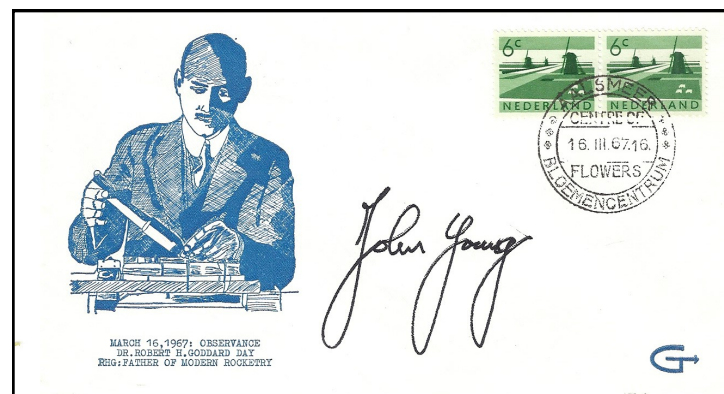
As for the value, there is a (limited) market also for the autopen signature, as they can be considered an a part of space history

"Secretarial" signatures are a bit more difficult to distinguish, because they are also made by a human hand, and not by a machine.

Here, for your interest, are some of the images I sent on ...



Autopen examples above and below



Above a Shepard “secretarial” and one of two genuine (?) early Glenn Signed covers in the batch, “worth” c £100 each.



**Bill Anders** very similar to a known early autopen pattern used before Apollo, characterized by the angled "G"

*W. G. Anders* - look and compare with the

*W. G. Anders*

following

**Alan L. Bean** Autopen Pattern 2 [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_bean-al.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_bean-al.shtml) (1968).

**Frank Borman**

This is known as "autopen Pattern 1" and was used until Apollo 8.

*Frank Borman*

*Frank Borman*

*Frank Borman*

**Scott Carpenter** difficult to say—might be genuine.



**Charles Conrad** Hb known autopen pattern from 1966 onward

**Walt Cunningham (2)**

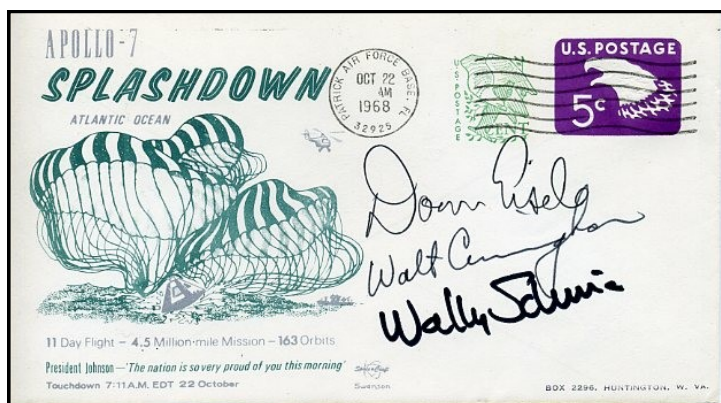
I've studied and compared some dozens of autographs: both early autographs (1968-69) and recent sigs I have from mid 90s to virtually today (I enclose some examples). The sigs in your covers seem to be "secretarial" pre-1967 autographs. Before his flight, for a short period, Cunningham added a flourish at the end of his signature

*Walt Cunningham*

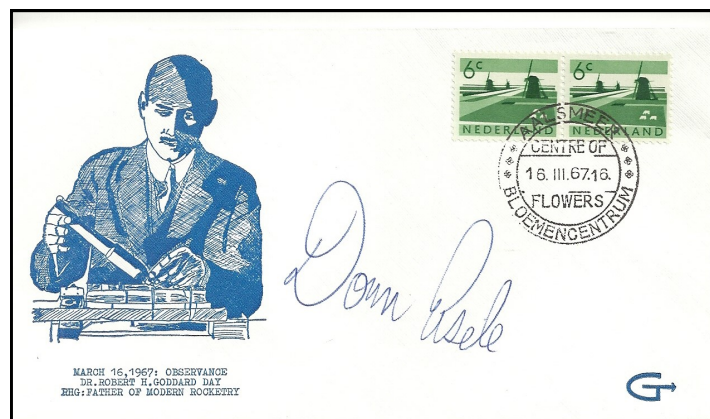
But the in the covers you submitted the "tile" appears as an addition after interruption, and is a bit different. Also "W" is shorter than normal

*Walt Cunningham*

I must say that "W" and "C" are consistent since 1968 ..



Above—genuine signatures from Eisele and Cunningham on the Apollo 7 cover and below—the two samples in the group I sent to Umberto



**Donn Eisele (2)** The genuine autographs are found on the Cunningham folder (covers 1968 AP07 launch and 1968 AP07 splashdown which I bought many years ago from Walt Cunningham). The two autographs are very different. they seem to be not very successful imitations See above right.

**Owen Garriott**

Early known autopen pattern

*Owen T. Garriott*

Genuine sigs are found in the enclosed Skylab folder in the cover SL-3 and SL Cunningham (which is a card – from the collection of Cunningham) which Walt got signed by all the crew when he was Chief of the Skylab astronauts).

**Edward G. Gibson**

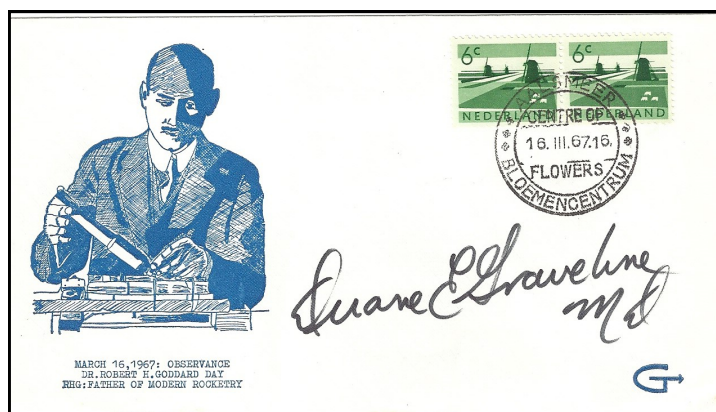
autopen Pattern 1 [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_gibson-eg.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_gibson-eg.shtml)

**John Glenn** (2)

it appears these are authentic items!  
He signed "J H Glenn, Jr" in the early 1960's.

**Richard F. Gordon, Jr.**

autopen Pattern 1 [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_gordon-rf.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_gordon-rf.shtml)

**Duane E. Graveline**

This is not an autopen. Has the characteristics of an autograph done by humans! It could be genuine.

Honestly I never seen his autograph. As I explained in my book, taking advantage of the fact that it transpired that Dr. Graveline, at the time of the appointment was filing a divorce case, Deke Slayton (who didn't like scientist-astronauts) "worrying that the divorce procedure could distract him from the new commitments", didn't hesitate to remove him instantly from the list, acting so quickly that Graveline did not even have time to appear in the first group photo

**Joseph P. Kerwin**

autopen Pattern 1 [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_kerwin-jp.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_kerwin-jp.shtml)

**Jim Lovell** (2)

The two covers seem to be autopenned with the same early pattern reported as being in use since 1962 [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_lovell-ja.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_lovell-ja.shtml)

**James A. McDivitt**

Very well done autopen pattern 2 [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_mcdivitt-ja.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_mcdivitt-ja.shtml)

**Curtis F. Michel**

Astronaut, astrophysicist - never flew in space  
Autopen Pattern 1 [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_michel-fc.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_michel-fc.shtml)

**Alan Shepard**

This seems to me a well done clean "secretarial" signature. The main feature is the "loopless" "h" (with no loop at the top), while Shepard's own looped style seems to have remained very consistent throughout, making it one of the more useful distinctive traits.

Also another important characteristics is the straight "r". In genuine Shepard signatures :the final stroke of the "r" tends to curve out to the right and to connect with the following d. Other minor details confirm  
I enclose for comparison few genuine sigs I have.

**Harrison Schmitt**

One of the most reluctant signer of all the Apollo program. Autopen pattern 1 (see [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_schmitt-hh.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_schmitt-hh.shtml))

'Rusty' L. Schweickart Autopen pattern 1 (see [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_schweickart-rl.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_schweickart-rl.shtml))

**Dave Scott** The most often autopen seen: listed as pattern n° 2 in [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_scott-dr.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_scott-dr.shtml)

**Deke Slayton** Autopen pattern 1 [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_slayton-dk.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_slayton-dk.shtml)

**Tom Stafford** Autopen pattern 1 (sometimes, like in this case, "." after P is missing, as reported in [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_stafford-tp.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_stafford-tp.shtml))

Stafford is not a good signer. I have received from NASA an ASTP cover genuinely signed by Slayton and Evans, with Stafford autopen (see enclosed 1975 ASTP US)

**John Young** Autopen pattern 2 (see [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_young-jw.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_young-jw.shtml))

**CC Williams** Autopen pattern 1 [http://www.astroautopens.com/ap\\_williams-cc.shtml](http://www.astroautopens.com/ap_williams-cc.shtml)

Personally, I have to say I am not convinced about the practice of comparing signatures on random specimen covers against known authentic models and making a judgment.

Clearly some examples in my batch were autopen—for example you can just about see the vibrating machine movement in the "Young" signature. But is *your* signature identical every time you use it? Mine is not. And what are autopen signatures worth—are they any better than a photocopy of a genuine signature or as Umberto asserts are they collectable as a genuine part of space history?

I would welcome comments on this debate.