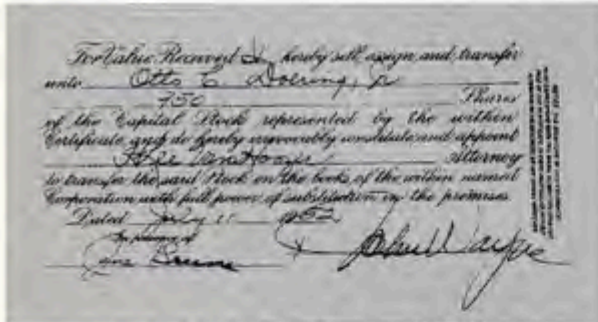


autograph DETECTIVE

Do You have the Detective Skills to be an Autograph Collector?

by Max Rambod

Many years ago when I was a collector, everyone used to ask me, "How do you know it's real?" I am certain this is also the question you are asked most often by your friends and family and, more importantly what you ask yourself. Of course, you feel more assured buying autographs from reputable dealers who guarantee authenticity and that is ultimately the key. But still, how can you learn to detect forgeries and know more about your collection? I will be writing a monthly article that will have the objective to help you, the autograph collector, learn more about autographs.

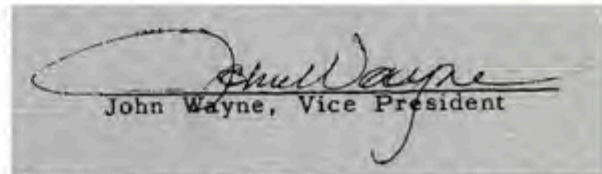


Example A-5 - Authentic John Wayne document

As such, I will deal extensively with authentication.

Let me first state that I believe most autograph items are indeed authentic. In fact, the concern about authenticity is greater in autographs than in other collectibles. In antiques for example, repairs are done on pieces which drastically reduce the value of the antiques, but are not pointed out to the buyer. Or in the

case of bronzes, you seldom see any authentic ones as almost all of them are later copies. Furthermore, dealers in our hobby offer far stronger guarantees than any other collectible dealers.

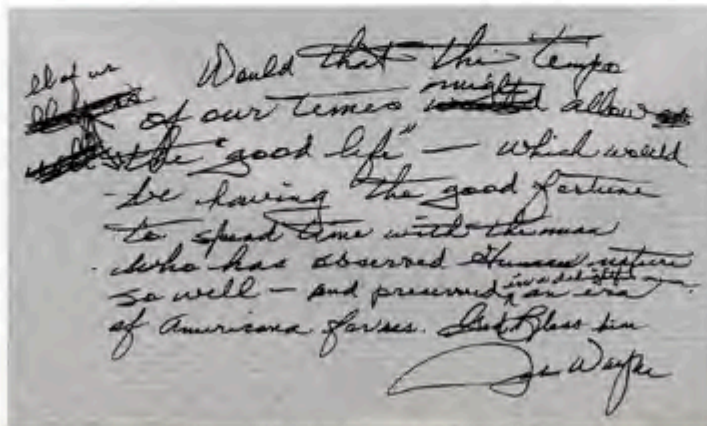


Example A-1 - Authentic John Wayne signed contract

Nevertheless, time and again I see that authenticity is what collectors are concerned about, and to be fair it is what I am also concerned about as a dealer. So that is what we will talk about in this column, and perhaps it will shed some light on some of your concerns. Authentication is not done by magic, but by hard work. In fact the work is somewhat like the work of a detective.

Your first task in authentication is establishing a standard of what is "genuine", and to do that you need to find samples of the person's signatures and handwriting. This

task does not mean that one sample in one book is enough. You will need many samples, and ideally samples from the same period as the questioned signature. Sometimes I see someone refer to a book that has a single example of a person's signature and compare it to the piece he is contemplating buying. This is very dangerous, as it can fool you either way — you could see a



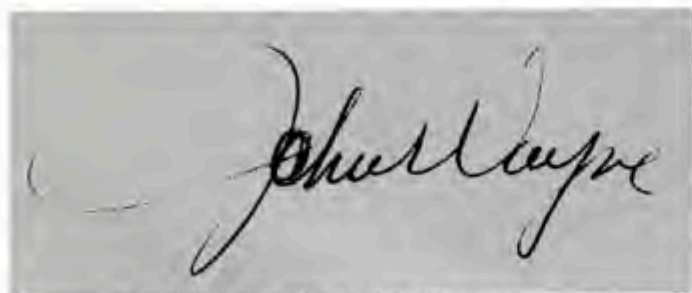
Example A-2 - Authentic John Wayne ALS



Example G-1 - Authentic John Wayne signed photo

big difference that could be due to the fact that the sample signature is an example from an entirely different time period and thus very different from other examples. Or, it could be that the writer has several different signatures, or you may see resemblances in the handwriting that are not relevant. To find samples of a person's autograph, you can make copies from illustrations in autograph books, from dealers' catalogues, or you can write to libraries for copies of specific letters.

Once you have gathered enough samples, you should compare them to your questioned autograph. You must evaluate whether the differences between your autograph item and the samples from your newly created file are beyond explanation, in which case you reject the questioned autograph. *You have to be a detective* — and look for specific characteristics in the handwriting and in the signatures, such

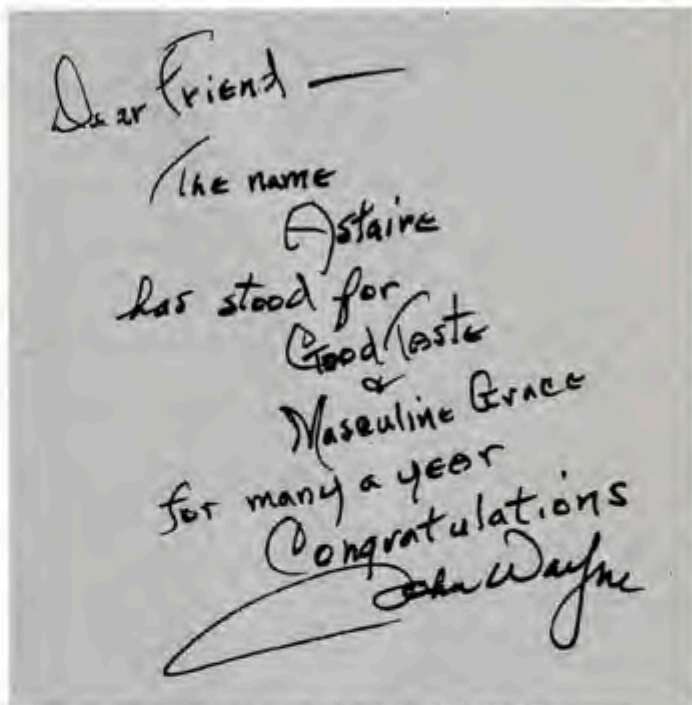


Example A-4 - Authentic John Wayne signature

as a period which appears consistently after a signature, a letter which is smaller or bigger than another, or letters which are separate from others. All these little idiosyncrasies are clues that will help you better detect forgeries. Each person has his own writing habits and idiosyncrasies. Your job is to find those habits. For example, Thomas Jefferson often starts new sentences without capital letters. Lincoln writes the last two letters of his name on a slightly higher plane than the rest of his name. Lucille Ball has a small "c" that is typically hers, as she wrote the "cu" going forward and

wrote again going backward, resulting in a small hook in the inside of the "c".

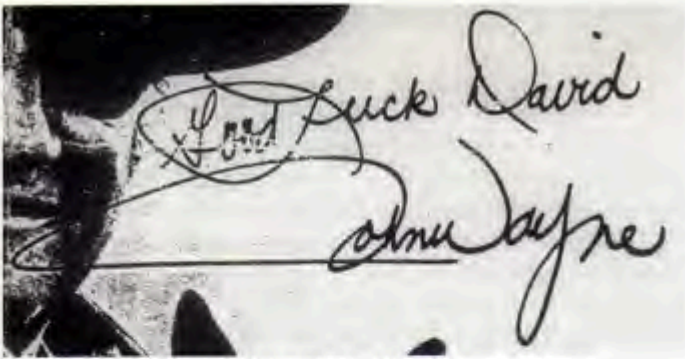
You will, at this point, have assembled many samples, some of which are clearly authentic such as items you obtained in person (if the person is still alive), or copies published in reliable books, etc. As a general rule, you should be naturally more suspicious of items that may have been signed by a secretary, like a photo of a popular actor. If you requested such an item by mail — chances are a secretary signed it. You can rely more on checks, or handwritten letters to a close family member since these are probably written in the author's own hand. Of course, this is a very general rule



Example A-3 - Authentic early note from John Wayne to Fred Astaire

with many exceptions. As we have all seen, there are many people who do *not* sign their own checks, such as President Kennedy, whose secretary Mrs. Lincoln usually signed for him. Still, financial documents more often bear a genuine signature. This does not mean that you should not buy signed photos, but for the purpose of your files, documents and handwritten letters are safer samples of authenticity.

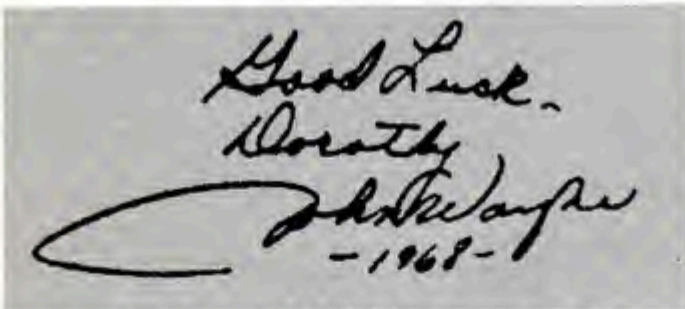
The writing habits we see will not happen every single time, but if the writer does it consistently enough, then that can become as individual as the writer's fingerprint. To demonstrate this point, I will take the case of John Wayne's signature. If you learn to detect his idiosyncrasies, then you will be able to recognize an authentic John Wayne autograph from a secretary or forger. Please remember that not every idiosyncrasy shows up every time. First, we go about finding many samples of his autograph and handwriting. I have over 30 samples in my John Wayne file, but we will look at nine samples here. Upon studying these examples, you will see that John Wayne is usually very consistent in his signature, in most cases, we can see that:



Example S-1 - Secretarial John Wayne signature from a signed photo

- 1) The "J" in John has a large powerful upper loop which is larger in size than the rest of his entire first name;
- 2) He almost always writes his "W" with the second loop larger than the first and the second loop of the "W" is never straight up but always rounded. The ending stroke of that "W" goes higher than the rest of his last name;
- 3) The "y" in Wayne often is lower than the other letters, and also forms a vertical line that starts higher than the preceding "a" and the following "n";
- 4) In "Wayne" the first bump of the "n" is higher than the second bump;
- 5) The "e" of Wayne has a long ending stroke and is never abruptly finished.

Looking at the ALS (example A-2) and the note from John Wayne to Fred Astaire (example A-3), and in both legal



Example S-2 - Secretarial John Wayne from a signed photo

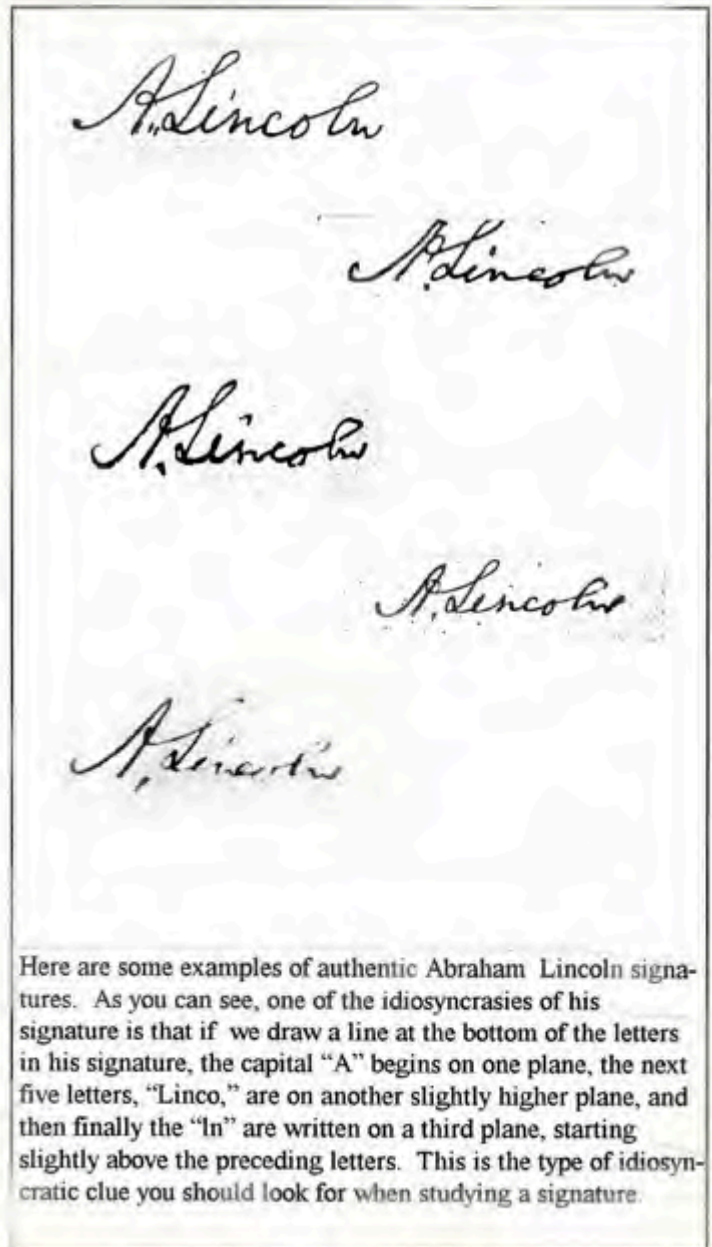
documents (examples A-1 and A-5), we see that the most peculiar part of John Wayne's handwriting was his "o's". You can observe that every one of his "o's" comes around from under (rather than from above like most of us). In fact, John Wayne used a double loop in the "o" in his signature in order to consistently come out from below. As he often inscribed "Good luck" above his signature, you will clearly see that in authentic Wayne samples, both "o's" in "Good" connect from the lowest point of the letter "o" on the base lie going upward to the next letter.

As a rule I would be very suspicious of any John Wayne autograph which has the "o" connecting to the following letter from the upper part. Almost none of John Wayne's secretaries copied his "o" correctly, and the few that did only used it in his signature but did not use the correct "o" in the inscription "Good luck" above his signature. Examples S-1

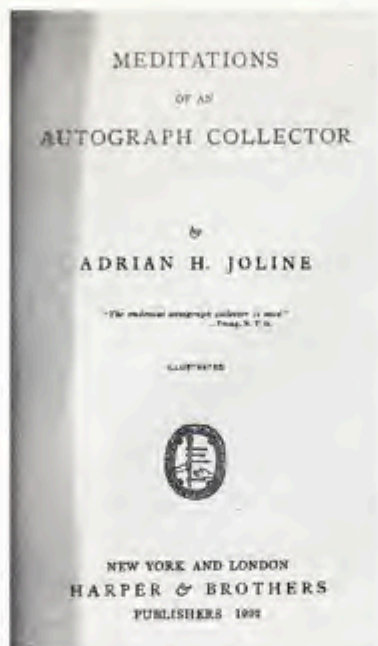
and S-2 are typical secretarial signatures found on many photos of John Wayne. Example G-1 is an authentic signed photo with the usual "Good Luck" and example G-2 is also authentic. It is important to notice these details in the writing as well as the signature so you can catch the secretary or forger's oversight.

So, we conclude that the first step towards detecting is to have many samples of the person's handwriting. You need to have these samples before passing judgment on the authenticity of an autograph, and you need to study those samples to find the characteristics that make the person's handwriting stand out from everyone else's and thus a dead giveaway from a secretarial signature or forgery. That is where the detective in you should come out.

Indeed, there are many details to look for such as the pressure of the pen, the spacing between words, the size of the words, slanting of the handwriting, where the pen starts and stops, the connection between letters — and many other important characteristics which we will discuss in the coming months.



Here are some examples of authentic Abraham Lincoln signatures. As you can see, one of the idiosyncrasies of his signature is that if we draw a line at the bottom of the letters in his signature, the capital "A" begins on one plane, the next five letters, "Linco," are on another slightly higher plane, and then finally the "ln" are written on a third plane, starting slightly above the preceding letters. This is the type of idiosyncratic clue you should look for when studying a signature.



"Meditations of an Autograph Collector", written by Adrian H. Joline in 1902.

book and autograph dealers in the world. If you can't find it there, you most likely won't find it anywhere.

There are smaller book fairs almost everywhere and held virtually every weekend. Some of the smaller fairs, while perhaps less sophisticated than the ABAA shows, often give collectors more of a chance to find a bargain. The publication

Bookman's Weekly lists many of these shows. If you can't locate this publication at your local newsstand or library, look in your local newspaper under weekend activities, and likely before long, you will locate a book fair. Another suggestion is to pen the Yellow Pages and call a local rare or used book dealer. They will tell you what shows are upcoming and can often give you passes for discounted admission. These book dealers, whether or not they do shows, may also be a good source for autographs. If you tell them what you're seeking, they often can steer you in the right direction.

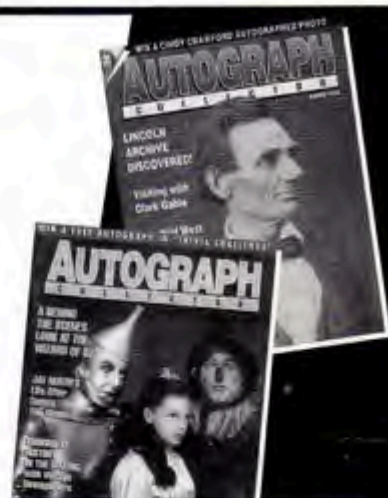
When you go to a fair, bring an open mind and some fairly clear goals. Time may not permit you to visit every dealer, so you may want to plan whom you will visit. I suggest bringing either a pre-printed stick-on label or a rubber stamp that has your address and wants, so you can save time when signing up for a dealer's mailing list. Remember to bring identification if you are planning to pay by check, as these dealers will ask. Always request the dealer to guarantee the authenticity of your purchase. This is important because many book dealers do not have the same knowledge as an autograph dealer and may make an innocent mistake. They should oblige, and their guarantee will safeguard your purchase should you later wish to verify it.

Most importantly, have fun! Stay away from the rare pontificator and you'll find an unimposing, wonderful world at book fairs. Be careful though; you might also become a book collector, too!

The Industry's Leading Publication

AUTOGRAPH COLLECTOR

Get 12 information-packed issues of **The Worldwide Publication** serving autograph collectors in the know!



Yes! Send me 12 issues of **AUTOGRAPH COLLECTOR** so I can keep up on the current prices and trends of autographs and much more!

To order toll free, call **(800) 395-1359**

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Check appropriate box:

U.S. \$38.00 Canada/Mexico \$72.00 All other Countries \$93.60

Cash, Check or Money Order enclosed Bill my Credit Card: VISA MC

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

AUTOGRAPH COLLECTOR, 510-A.S. Corona Mall • Corona, CA 91719-1420

AC

Each Issue Features ...

- **FREE GIVEAWAY CONTESTS**
(in the past few months we've given lucky winners thousands of dollars worth of autographs and memorabilia).
- Current prices and trends.
- Auction results.
- Thousands of offerings from the nation's top dealers.
- VIP addresses you can use to write for **FREE** autographs.
- Secrets on building a collection for minimal cost.
- Tips for beginners.

WIN A BRADY BUNCH SIGNED LIMITED EDITION PRINT!

AUTOGRAPH

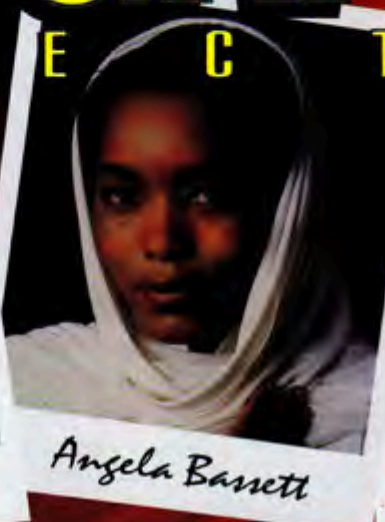
AUTOGRAPH

C O L L E C T O R

**TOP 10
AUTOGRAPH
SIGNERS!**



Tom Hanks



Angela Bassett



Jean Claude Van Damme

**ELIZABETH TAYLOR
VISITS SANDERS MEANDERS**

**NEW COLUMN:
AUTOGRAPH DETECTIVE!**

Top 10
**BEST
AND WORST
SIGNERS**



Mel Gibson



Jodie Foster



Jamie Lee Curtis



Kevin Costner

JULY 1995
U.S. \$4.95
CANADA \$5.95

