A few years ago the NASA scientists at Goddard Institute in New York City had a computer that was maintained by an outside firm. Occasionally the programmers took the computer "down" for a day or so to make sure it was running properly. Carl Frederick, who worked at the Goddard Space Flight Center at the time, tells me that it gradually became apparent that these maintenance checks had a strange periodicity: The computer was being regularly removed from NASA's hands around the first of every month, for no apparent reason. Finally an explanation surfaced: The first of the month was when Scientific American came out. The computer experts were borrowing NASA's machine in order to work out the puzzles in Martin Gardner's popular Mathematical Games column.

Gardner first started delighting scientists with his mathematical diversions in 1957. He resigned 25 years later, in 1982, in order to devote more time to other projects. In celebration of his sixtieth birthday, October 21, 1979, I devoted my column in Omni that month to Martin Gardner, the man Time magazine once called "The Mathemagician."

Gardner has approximately 35 books in print, not counting numerous children's books and volumes sold only in magic stores. His most successful work is The Annotated Alice, a personal loving look at Lewis Carroll's classic Wonderland tales. It was first published in 1960 by Clarkson Potter, Inc., and still sells over 30,000 copies a year. The jacket photo on that book shows a crew-cut Gardner atop the bronze Alice statue in New York's Central Park. Over 20 years later Gardner again climbed onto Alice's lap and allowed me to update the scene.

Martin Gardner is not a public man. He consistently declines all offers to make public appearances, give speeches, or accept awards. This, combined with his productivity and versatility, at one time gave rise to the rumor that he didn't exist, and that the name "Martin Gardner" was a pseudonym used jointly by Carl Sagan and Isaac Asimov.

Gardner's generosity continues to this day. He has selflessly shared ideas, contacts, and files, and many subjects he introduced me to eventually appeared in my column. It was Gardner who first showed me the invertible signatures designed by Scott Kim. Kim's own tribute to Gardner is shown below. Both names, "Martin" and "Gardner" read exactly the same upside-down!

After this design appeared in Omni, he bettered himself by producing a new signature in which both names are incorporated into a single design.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

(For more of Kim's remarkable work, see his book Inversions, published in 1981 by McGrawHill.)

Gardner and his wife Charlotte have since moved to North Carolina, but at the time of my 1979 festschrift they lived in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, appropriately...