

MATTHEW A. HENSON

POLAR EXPLORER

After losing eight toes, several dogs to hunger, many lives, and much needed rest, Matthew Henson and Robert E. Peary placed the American flag at the top of the world, the North Pole. A journey eighteen years in the making had finally been completed, and Matthew Henson had achieved his victory.

Matthew Henson was born August 8, 1866 in Charles County, Maryland. His parents died when he was young so he set off for Washington, D.C., working small jobs. When he was just 21, Robert E. Peary discovered Henson and together they traveled the world. Their biggest adventure of all was the Arctic. Because Henson's skin was dark, the Eskimos believed he was one of them. The Eskimos proved to be friends by teaching him how to build sleds and handle the dog team. They taught him to hunt, speak their language and keep from freezing. Henson taught the rest of the party of explorers useful secrets about the frozen North, and soon became the most valuable person in the group. They could never have reached the North Pole without the help of the Eskimos.

Because of the cold, bitter storms and winds they faced, Peary lost eight toes to frost bite. Now crippled, Henson had to pull Peary behind him to make the journey. But on April 6, 1909, the hardships paid off as they reached the North Pole. Never before in the history of America have two people, one white and one black, been so dedicated to achieving the same goal. Peary and Henson would not give up.

However, because of the color of his skin Mathew Henson received none of the recognition for this journey. Instead, Robert E. Peary was the one who wore the medal.