

Negro Group

Beanne
5-16-39

Mathew A. Henson, Artic Explorer

On April 6, 1909, two American citizens planted the stars and stripes on the top of the world thus claiming the vast territory around the North Pole for the United States. One was the widely heralded Robert E. Peary who since 1896 had made numerous attempts to reach the pole. No less important was his Negro companion, Mathew A. Henson, who had braved all the rigors of the Artic wastes and who had performed invaluable ^N to all but one of Peary's persistent attempts to reach the pole.

About Henson, Peary himself wrote shortly after his triumph, " Mathew A. Henson, my Negro assistant has been with me in one capacity or another since my second trip to Nicaragua in 1887. I have taken him with me on each and all my northern expeditions except the first in 1886, and almost without exception, on each of my farthest sledge trips. This position I give him primarily because of his adaptability[#] and fitness for the work, secondly on account of his loyalty. He is now (1910) 40-years-old, and can handle a sledge better, and is probably a better dog driver than any other man living except some of the Eskimo hunters themselves." (I)

The child Mathew, was born to Lemuel and Caroline Henson on August 8, 1866, at Charles County, Maryland. While still a boy, his parents moved to Washington where they soon died. With the aide of his uncle, however, he was able to study in the Washington Public School System for another six years.

He went to Baltimore when he was fourteen and hired out as a cabin boy on the Katie Hines bound for China. Within four years he had sailed before the mast to the Philippines, Africa, France and Russia. He was a very practical minded youngster and easily mastered the principles of navigation as well as all the intricacies of blacksmithing, carpentry and cooking, a training later to be of no slight value on his north pole ventures.

Henson met Peary as a young Naval Lieutenant in a hat store in Washington where he was temporary working in 1888. The naval officer was immediately attracted by the Negro's congenial, smiling self confidence. Besides both had the eyes in common. He immediately realized his value and hired him as his orderly. The following year he took him to the Messenger League Navy Yard in Philadelphia as his personal messenger. But being a personal servant was not the height of Henson's ambition, and he applied himself to becoming a trusted worker and helper, and a proficient mechanic and explorer. And the longer the two men knew each other, the more attached they became.

Peary had made several attempts to reach the pole before the successful venture in 1909. As stated before, Henson was a key man on all these trips with the exception of the first expedition which took place before he became acquainted with Peary. The last trip to the pole was conceived in New York City during the early part of 1908. On July 6 of that year, eight seasoned navigators, including Henson, a doctor and several scientists sailed from New York harbor on the S. S. Roosevelt which had been especially equipped.

The jack-of-all-trades^{tel} services of Henson were demanded more on this trip than on any of the others. During the whole time of the voyage, the decks and cabins of the Roosevelt resounded with, "Matt, the Commander wants you." "Matt do this." "Matt do that." He knew the language of the Eskimos and helped Peary choose the Eskimo personnel, a job of no small means inasmuch as every hunter wanted to go along. He was an expert hunter and fisher and led most of the hunts for food. He made most of the sledges and was the only one who could handle the savage treacherous Eskimo dogs when they were ordinary. On numerous occasions his hands became dangerously frozen in pursuit of his duties. Not a few times did he save the life of one of his comrades by risking his own life in fishing them out of the icy arctic sea. And strange as it may seem, Henson, the Negro was better able to stand the biting deathlike coldness than any of his white companions.

The Roosevelt was navigated as close to the pole as it was possible to get by water and layed^F-up on the ice. From this base the men made successive trips into the polar region, each approaching closer to the pole and storing supplies for the party that was to follow and for the return of the party that would make the final dash. This phase of the expedition took several weeks. The crucial moment came around April 1. Henson was chosen by the Commander to make the final dash with him because of his all round usefulness as well as his physical stamina.

On April 6, 1909, observations having been taken, checked and re-checked, the weather beaten party of two Americans and four Eskimoes claimed the north pole for the United States. It was a triumphant moment for Henson. With his own hands he had built the five sledges with which the journey to the pole was completed; had even helped Peary take the astronomical observances that proved them on top of the pole as well.

The journey back to the States took six months. The S.S. Roosevelt docked in New York early in October, 1909. As might have been expected, Peary and his white companions were honored and feated, and made handsome profits from their lecture tours. The invaluable Henson was immediately forgotten save by members of his own race who tendered a formal testimonial for him, during October, where he was presented with a gold watch and chain.

Two years earlier he had taken Lucy Jane Ross of New York as his

bride. He launched several unsuccessful lecture tours and in 1912 published a record of his experiences under the title, "A Negro Explorer at the North Pole."

The heroic services of one who had contributed so much to bring American geographic endeavors before the world was soon forgotten by the American public; was never remembered as a matter of fact by the American Government. Largely through the influence of Negro politicians a \$960 ^{month} a week job in the Customs service was secured for him. This has been as close to official recognition as he has gotten. He was working in a Brooklyn warehouse for \$16 per week when he received that appointment.

Today Hanson is the only living survivor of that glamorous but bleak expedition that first reached the pole. He lives with his wife and brother at 246 West 150 Street a quiet retiring but congenial and physically powerful old man. He has been retired from Federal services for several years.

Henson, Mathew A., A Negro Explorer at the North Pole

Excellent pictures

919.8 H, S.C., I35 StP. L.

Fausett, Arthur Huff, For Freedom

920F., N.D., ibid

Hall, Thomas F. "Has the North Pole Been Discovered

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920B, N.D., ibid

Authentication

(1) From preface, A Negro Explorer at North Pole.

MATHEW HENSON

(Interviewed Feb. 20, 1940)

Abram Hill

Feb. 21, 1940

Mathew Henson, the first man to set foot on the North Pole, cordially received me in his home at 246 West 150 St on Tuesday, February 20th. Having called Mr. Henson and made an appointment, he was waiting patiently and was very glad of the occasion to be interviewed. When I told him about the book, Negroes of New York, he was elated that such a book was coming out and would look forward to reading it.

Mr. Henson, though seventy-three years of age, looks no more than fifty. He is a medium sized man, deep tan complexion, slightly bald with temples just beginning to gray. He is well preserved and shows no evidence of the ordeal of his outstanding exploits in the Arctic country.

He retired from active service three years ago. He worked in the Customs House for twenty-three years. He had previously worked in the Navy Yard in Philadelphia for two years. This gave him a total of twenty-five years in the service of the government. He has no longing for active service again. He, unlike most men in retirement, is contented rather than have the urge to be up and out again. His lectures, associates and his daily walks which include five or six miles a day keep him alert and active enough.

When asked if he was disappointed over the failure of the lack of congressional recognition

government to accord him his proper recognition, he stated rather candidly that "one cannot eat medals". His reaction was mild and pleasant. If Congress had awarded him a medal it would have been gladly received. However that august body didn't, because of 'southern' influence, according to Mr. Henson, and he has suffered none the less. When it was pointed out that Admiral Peary could have agitated for the same recognition he got when he received his medal, Henson pointed out that after all the first law of nature is self-preservation.

The writer was amazed at the revelations made by Mr. Henson concerning his long journeys at sea. He has been around the world eight times. These trips were made prior to his trip to the pole. "Wind-jams" were the old sail boats used in those days and Mr. Henson rose from the hassock in the middle of the living room floor and dramatized one of his heroic struggles with the ropes with ghoulish enthusiasm. He still has an abundance of energy left.

"A Negro at The North Pole, the book written by the explorer, was a complete flop. He contends that Negroes, as a whole, don't buy books and that whites were more interested in the pole than they were the Negro who just happened there. According to him, most of his audiences among the colored groups do not pay him. Either they want him to travel miles and speak for nothing or else discuss percentages. Therefore he just 'gives' it to them for nothing. It is expected or else he 'insults' them.

Eskimo dog meat is excellent. The only trouble is that He couldn't get enough of it. He says it has a slimy taste and re-

quires little or no chewing. "Put it in your mouth. It just slides down." As a matter of fact, usually his jaws were frozen and such locomotion as eating was impossible. Go five days without eating, said this man who should know, and you will eat anything.

Upon asking him to explain to me just what it looked like at the pole, (The childhood impression I once had still lingers with me...that is you come to a point like the top of an orange), He explained in detail that it was a steady climb upward for 213 miles. There is no longitude. Roving blocks of ice, sometimes one hundred feet high, crack and break the path. You cannot go fifteen minutes without some part of your body freezing. Ice cakes around the hood. Only pressures from your hands melt it. Moisture around the mouth freezes and makes speech difficult. Death from freezing must be an easy way out, for it feels like the pricking of a pin for only a few minutes and then you feel no more.

Mr. Henson showed me three honorary article he has received. The New York Amsterdam News gave him a Hamilton-turn over watch at a testimonial in his honor in 1939. His "colored friends in New York" gave him a Tiffany watch at a banquet at which time Charles Anderson was toast master in 1909. The third gift was a silver loving cup, now completely tarnished, given him by the Bronx Chamber of Commerce in 1929. Mr. Henson was a resident of the Bronx for seventeen years. He is a

The explorer holds membership in the Explorers Club and the Artic Club. He is a Mason and a member of the Abyssian Baptist Church. His wife, the former Lucy J. Ross, is the leading soloist th

soprano of the choir at this Harlem institution.

Mr. Henson lives a quite modest life with his wife, who does clerical work and a great fo civic welfare work. Their home is comfortable and well adapted to their purposes. The deed done by MR. Henson did not make him rich, From the writers observations, they do live above average, that is the average up Harlem Way.

He doesn't remember his mother. His father died when he was five years of age. He isthe youngest of six children. Three of them died and three are living. A brother lives in Phildelphia. A sister;lives in Washington. After the death of his father, he had to fend for himself and his family for twenty years. He was traveling all over the globe Mathew Henson concluded, He was the black sheep of the lot. I concluded yes, "Mr. Henson, and what a Black Sheep!" Thus the interviewed ended.

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~~Negroes of New York~~

By
Michael Rothman

5/26/39

Re: Matthew A. Henson

New York's Reaction to Peary's Discovery of
the North Pole.

When the announcement was first made by Commander Robert E. Peary that his Arctic party of exploration had reached the North Pole, the scientific world remained calm. There were no outbursts of acclaim nor were honors voted to the man who had achieved the ~~farthest~~ ^{furthest} northern point on the Earth. The reason for this lack of enthusiasm and the story of Peary's Polar claim being unable to receive acceptance is actually a story of a newspaper circulation war in New York City, and the story of the greatest hoax ^{ever} perpetrated upon newspaper readers.

To begin with, one must first bear in mind that by 1908 the 20th Century age of scientific miracles was in full swing. The airplane, automobile, and movies were beginning to grasp popular imagination. Man's knowledge of the ~~unimense~~ ^{Earth's} surface was proceeding apace with the introduction of new machines and tools to produce greater and greater quantities of commodities to be marketed among the nations of the world. Imperialism's nose for new markets and new sources of raw materials soon began pointing to the extremities of the Earth. What existed at either end? What was to be found underneath the whatever it was

two

that made up the North and South Polar regions? For it was here that man's knowledge stopped. The answer to these questions could only be found by exploration. Robert E. Peary, of the U.S. Navy, was one of those who set forth to try his luck. For several years past, Peary had been attempting to reach the North Pole. Up to 1909 all his attempts had been failures. But in the month of April accompanied by his Negro companion, Matthew A. Henson, and two Esquimaux, Peary accomplished his mission and claimed the region for the United States.

in August 1909
Upon the Peary party's return to human habitation/ from which they could send announcement of their discovery to the world, Peary was informed that another Arctic explorer, Dr. Frederick Cook, had already announced such a discovery several weeks earlier. ~~That is to say~~ Cook's announcement of discovery predated Peary's discovery by five days. What ordinarily might seem coincidental on the surface, was to all indications of arctic experience impossible. What might have been accepted by world and forgotten was instead to develop into a major scandal.

Peary, who had been paid five thousand dollars by the New York Times for the story of the discovery, was thus forced into the position of having delivered cold news. Dr. Cook, his rival, had been paid twenty-four thousand for his story of the discovery and had delivered hot news to the Times competitors, the World and Herald. Peary, faced with the loss of credit that is due to the explorer, immediately challenged the account of Cook. Their newspaper backers respectively and immediately took up the cudgels for the defense of their champions and the annihilation of the enemy.

The controversy that waged pro and con undoubtedly must have had half the world discussing the stories of both explorers. In New York City, the focal point of the debate, the combined circulation of the Cook

page three

account was immensely greater than Peary's in the New York Times. As a matter of fact Peary seemed to be the loser from all indications until his arrival in the city On October 2nd.

The N.Y. Tribune recording the event of his arrival announced it was a quiet one and that Peary had slipped off to his home without notice from anyone. The circulation war and mud-slinging accompaniment had damned Peary.

On October 16th, 1909 Dr. Cook arrived in the city and was greeted with a tremendous ovation which was comparable to that ^{later} accorded to Lindbergh in 1927. Cook was given the keys to the city and civic bodies fell over themselves to do him honor.

Meanwhile the controversy ~~was~~ was reaching new heights. ~~of~~ The flat denunciation by Peary of Cook that Cook had falsified his account and that, further, all evidence available to Peary proved conclusively that Cook had never reached the Pole could not be glossed over by the University of Copenhagen, Cook's backer. Peary's notes and the account of his trip was accurate. His observations were corroborated by the data of the other members who had established bases as far north as the 88th parallel ~~which were farther north than any other expeditions had ever ventured.~~ ^{which were farther north than any other expeditions had} Peary's reputation and Peary's expedition were too well known and respected within the scientific world to be completely ignored. That Peary had reached the Pole was acceded. The ticklish task of determining who had been first to reach the Pole seemingly could only be settled by an international body of scientists.

When Cook arrived in New York, there appeared an insignificant item on page three of the New York Tribune announcing the beginning of a lecture tour by Henson, Peary's companion, despite the objections of Peary .

Henson's opening lecture, under the auspices of William A. Brady, at the Hippodrome on Sunday Oct. 17th, was the best indication of the general reaction throughout the city to Peary.

In the words of the Tribune the next day, Henson was "heckled". The audience was extremely small and Mr. Brady remarked that this must be due to "the fact that a negro had found the pole after hundreds of years of search".

Actually as the paper continued ~~repeating~~ its report one's impression was strengthened that the general feeling was one of hostility to Peary ~~and~~ for the following reasons:

- 1) Peary was not a gentleman. He had called Cook a liar.
 - 2) Peary was a "nigger-lover" because he had taken Henson with him.
 - 3) Peary was backed by the Times and was not a friend of the people but of the big business people.
 - 4) Peary had to have a big expedition. Cook did it all by himself.
- etc.

The upshot of the Cook episode was the final refusal by the University of Copenhagen to accept the data of Cook. It seems that Cook submitted a typewritten sheet of data which was proven to be the work of an astronomer whereas Peary's data consisted of notes made by himself and party during the entire expedition. His calculations and log entries as well as diary were conclusive proof that he had been successful. The photographs Cook submitted were proven to be faked, etc.

An interesting commentary on the dispute is the fact that to this very day there are apologists for Cook and many firm believers in Cook. And to cap the story, the one man whom the world was willing to grant the credit of having been to the Pole was Matt Henson, a Negro. But because of the prejudice of the time, Henson was never given recognition or acclaim.

Thirty years later, ^{commemorating} ~~on~~ the anniversary of the dash to the pole, Henson was granted the first public recognition when a banquet was held in his honor.

Reich
8/22/40

Resume of material on Matthew Henson
appearing in the Amsterdam News between
Saturday April 29, 1939 and May 27, 1939

Build-up feature: Saturday, April 29, 1939 - page 11

by

St. Clair Bourne

"Real Hero May Yet Be Honored"

"... the only living member of the historic expedition which was the first to reach the North Pole..." ... " 30 years ago this month."

"Had one white and four Eskimo companions."

"72 years of age"

"Matt Henson is a Forgotten Man" (Sub-cap)

"In the annals of exploration and discovery, Commodore Robert E. Peary, leader of the expedition, holds one of the most eminent positions. The four Eskimos, Gootah, Egingwah, Teeglo and Goqueah, have likewise gone to their graves with high honors.

"But Matt Henson, still alive, is the 'forgotten man'".

Volumes were written about the expedition. Henson's own work "A Negro Explorer at the North Pole", published 1912, has never enjoyed above average sales. Henson went on a lecture tour and met with indifferent success after the expedition. He worked

in a warehouse for \$16.00 a week. Then came the nearest thing to official recognition -- a \$960 a year job with the Customs Service. Regular increases raised this figure to about \$2,100 a year before he was retired in 1936.

A campaign was launched by Frederick R. Moore, Civic leader and newspaper publisher to secure the granting of an annual \$2,500 pension. This campaign never quite achieved success.

Henson lives with his wife in a four room apartment at 246 West 150th Street on a regular \$1,200 a year pension which goes to all retired employees in his bracket.

Henson learned the Eskimo language. (He claims there are only 500 words in the language.)

Description of the cold during the Polar dash and reminiscences about Peary, Eskimo life, etc., follows.

"Great Explorer was Orphan"

Born August 8, 1886, Henson was the son of Lemuel and Caroline (Gaines) Henson of Charles County, Maryland. He was schooled at the N. Street School in Washington, D. C., until he was eight years old when he became an orphan. A year later he was engaged as cabin boy on the "Katie Hines" -- a coastwise

steamer, which shipped on sea-going windjammers... (cont. pg. 25)

Henson met Peary in 1887 and the two men became almost inseparable.

In 1907, he married a New York girl, Lucy Jones Ross.

The Bronx Chamber of Commerce presented him with a trophy in 1929, when he was a resident in that borough.

Then followed these awards:

Honorary Master of Science, Morgan College in 1924

Certificate of Active member in Explorers' Club.

(Expect another Honorary Master of Science from Harvard University, in June 1939).

"U.S. Government Has Ignored Henson"

Amsterdam News Article:

Saturday, May 6, 1939

Front Page, carried over to page 3

"MAT HENSON TO BE HONORED AT
BANQUET HERE"

"The Amsterdam News and a committee of sponsors are extending a community-wide invitation to the citizens of Harlem to attend a testimonial dinner in honor of Matthew Henson, co-discoverer of the North Pole, Thursday night, May 18, at the Renaissance Casino."

The Banquet Hall was donated by the management.

Dinner \$1.25 per plate.

Sponsors included prominent local clergy, businessmen, professional and political leaders, and civic biggies.

Amsterdam News article:

Saturday, May 13, 1939

Front page, continued on page 5

"Mat Henson's Dinner Plans
Are Complete"

"With thousands of messages and letters from prominent citizens throughout the U.S. the dinner promises to be one of the most significant affairs ever held in Harlem."

Two letters were received from the White House -- one from the President and one from Mrs. Roosevelt, expressing their regret at being unable to attend the dinner and lauding the spirit and purpose of the occasion.

Governor Lehman, wrote he believed the Testimonial Dinner "is worthwhile and deserving. His place in history is well-established. He was Admiral Peary's constant companion and his devoted friend. The admiral's press dispatches proved that Henson was one of the most important members of the Arctic Exploration Party."

Representative Joseph A. Gavagan - to attend dinner and serve on the sponsoring committee. U. S. Senator Robert A. Taft served on sponsoring committee. Dr. Louis T. Wright, police surgeon, to be present. City Councilman Baldwin on the sponsoring committee. Long list of sponsors of lesser fame and importance.

Amsterdam News article:

Saturday, May 20, 1939

Front page - continued to page 5

"Mat Henson's Dinner ~~xxxx~~
Thursday, at Renaissance"

Elmer A. Carter to act as toastmaster.

Speaker's list:- Senator James A. Meade, Magistrate
Myles A. Paige, Councilman Baldwin, Postmaster Albert Goldman,
A. Philip Randolph, Walter White, Tax Commissioner Hubert A. Delaney,
Congressman Joseph A. Gavagan, Mrs. Vivian Carter~~xx~~Mason, Mrs.
Bessye J. Bearden and Dr. Stephanson of the Explorers' Club.

Vernon Andrade's orchestra.

Amsterdam News Article:

Saturday May 27, 1939

Front page - continued on page 12

"Honor Matt Henson at Colorful Testimonial"

(Pictures on page 12.)

"Magnificent tribute ... 30 years later".

Henson was presented with a wrist watch inscribed
"New York Amsterdam News, Testimonial 1939, to Matt Henson,
First Man at the North Pole."

Famous members of the Explorers Club were introduced
by Lowell Thomas.

No editorial appeared in the Amsterdam News either before or after the Dinner.

It appears that the only tangible results of all the campaigning, were the dinner and the wrist watch.

There is no information as to the outcome of the campaign for the pension.

MATHEW HENSON
(Biographical Sketch)

Abram Hill

Feb. 14, 1940

Mathew Henson, the Negro who accompanied Admiral Peary on his arctic expeditions and the first explorer to reach the North Pole, was born in Charles County, Maryland in 1867. He was left an orphan at the age of eight, having lost both parents. He attended the public schools of Washington D.C. and later found employment in that city as a porter in a hat store.

Henson maybe called a self made man in view of the fact that he was compelled to educate himself and at the same time maintain himself with the necessities of life. It was comparatively easy for him to follow an adventurous life. Like many youths of that day, he had a yearning for the sea. He was a cabin boy on an ocean steamer until he was eighteen years of age. His voyages took him to destinations as far away as China and Russia. When this early desire for traveling had been fulfilled, he again returned to Washington where he worked as a porter in a hat store.

Here, one day Peary walked in the store to buy a hat. He left the store with the hat and Henson. Peary recognized in Henson ~~those qualities necessary for~~ traveling in unknown worlds, for adventure, for bravery and one who had little regard for self. This was the beginning of a companionship, a leader and

his aid, a boss and his worker that was to make history for America.

The fact that Henson was a Negro was of little or no concern ~~to~~ Peary! Though the explorer found himself explaining just why he made such a choice. He never compromised nor apologized for this selection. In spite of the fact that Henson proved that he possessed every grain of salt his boss had seen in him, the world has yet to accord him his due credit. For he is the only living man who has set foot on the North Pole. He was the first among the three men, Peary included, to arrive at the history making destination.

He " stood as near as men could get to that geographical purpoint in the center of more than a million square miles of drift ice and raised the American flag, bringing to a climax three centuries of effort to break down the barriers of the artic."

Henson was indispensable to Peary. With eighteen years of experience equal to that of Peary himself, an expert dog driver, a master mechanic, physically strong, most popular with the Eskimos and speaking their language perfectly, full of grit, he went on with Peary because he was the most efficient of all Peary's assistants, white or Eskimo.

The admiral had made three unsuccessful attempts to reach the Pole previously. In 1893, Peary trekked across Greenland, ignorant of the fact that Greenland was an Island. His Eskimos deserting in body, after several had skidded on the

edge of an ice crevice. In 1894, only Hugh Lee White and Mathew Henson were willing to remain with Peary another season. This was more than a task. It was an ordeal. Henson drove ten dogs. Their food gave out. He killed the dogs for food until there were only two left. They cut up boot tops and boiled them into a stew. They had to crack up a sledge for kindling wood. Nevertheless, the pioneers never gave up.

Though Peary was aware of the fact that ship after ship had crushed in the relentlessly jaws of the polar pack, that Sir John Franklin and his one hundred and twenty-nine men perished, the starvation of De Lang and his crew on the Northern shores of Liberia and the Greely suffering. But Henson had faith in the Admiral, the great leader devoted to an ideal. The man with a singleness of purpose, determination, energy and love of country was not to be defeated.

When Peary called for a fourth expedition to try again to reach the pole, Henson was the first to volunteer. Though he remembered the blizzards, the trail smushed with ice, probable death at every step of the way. The trip called for the most dangerous traveling known, one hundred and seventy-four miles from the ship.

On the last dash of that long bitter journey, mind you with temperature at 74 degrees below zero, only four men had been able to survive. The admiral's toes froze and Henson chopped them off for him. All the Eskimos died sooner or later. Henson, traveling forty-five minutes ahead of Peary, was the first to reach the goal.

Peary arrived and fastened the flag to the staff and planted it firmly on the top of his igloo. For a few minutes it hang limp and lifeless in the dead calm of the haze, and then a slight breeze, increasing in strength caused the folds to straighten out and soon it was rippling out in sparkling colors.

" A thrill of patriotism ran through men and I raised my voice to cheer the starry emblem of my native land. The Eskimos gathered around, and, taking the tube from Peary, three hearty cheers rang out over the still frisky air."

Peary and his crew returned to America under a blaze of glory. An imposter had preceeded them, one Captain Frederick Cook. Cook claimed that he had discovered the pole. This made it difficult for Peary and Henson to prove false. Later the good Captain Cook landed in the Atlanta Penitentiary with his claims and credentials for fraud.

Peary won the highest recognition the country could offer him by being decoarated with a congressional medal and made and Admiral in the U.S. Navy. Henson lectured for four years forwhich he was paid three hundred dollars a week. Harlem gave him a big dinner and a gold watch. When the spasm of race pride had waned, Henson found himself with a sixteen dollar a week job in a warehouse.

La Gaurdia, then representative in the lower house from New York, tried in vain to get Henson a medal and recognition in congress. Several other congressmen did the same. Since 1909

several congressman and pressure from sources all over the world has been brought to bear on the Government to give Henson his proper recognition. The late President Taft appointed him a clerk in the New York Custom^{House}. Later he was advanced to senior clerk at two thousand dollars a year. This job resulted after the three hundred dollars weekly contract provided through the William A. Brady theatrical agency had expired and the sixteen dollars a week earned in the warehouse job had diminished to nothing.

Henson married the year before he made the successful trip and he received no salary. Nevertheless, his wife did manage to live while her husband was away making history.

The only honor bestowed upon Henson was an honorary degree conferred upon him by Morgan College, a Negro institution in Baltimore. In March 1929, the Bronx Chamber of Commerce presented him with a loving cup. In 1932 Senator Copeland introduced a bill in the senate providing for a pension for Henson.

He retired in 1936 at the age of seventy after working in the Custom House since 1914.

Today Mr. Henson lives quietly in Harlem without any fanfare. He never raised any stir for his great deed. Tan, spectacle person, he has suffered from eye trouble caused by snow storms. Otherwise he is still a youngish robust sort of man who looks upon the present flights over the pole as sissified.

In 1939, Lowell Thomas gave a celebrity party which attracted the daily press. Present was a turbaned 'shiek'. Lo-

well Thomas introduced him thusly, "I take this occasion to point out the only living American who accompanied Peary to the North Pole." Then he went on to praise Henson for his heroic deed.

Donald B. Mac Millan stated in the New York Evening Graphic, "No honor has been bestowed upon him but by an Eastern Negro College. It is race prejudice which has stood in the way of honoring Henson for his arctic work. I believe that any geographic society, by defying criticism, through prejudice to the winds and honor Henson, could confer greater honor upon itself than upon the Negro. Peary took Henson with him instead of us because Henson was the best man."

Mathew Henson lives in Harlem with his wife. They are are contented citizens of the community and pursue a life befitting any of the three hundred thousand Negroes of Harlem.

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"A Negro At The North Pole" was written by Henson. It was an unsuccessful book on his plight with Peary. It seems that the public was more interested in Peary than they they were the Negro assistant with him.

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