

THE FAMILY SECTION

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Sunpapers photo—Nolan

**ARCTIC ADVENTURERS**—Herbert M. Frisby holds walrus tusks he brought back from one of his seventeen trips north of the Arctic Circle. Mr. Frisby, the second Negro ever to go to the North Pole, was friend and biographer of Matthew Henson, co-discoverer of the Pole with Peary.

## First Man At North Pole

# Recognition Of Henson Comes After 15 Years Work By Frisby

By TRAVIS KIDD

Last month the first State-sponsored memorial raised to a Negro in Maryland and the first ever placed in the State House was unveiled at Annapolis.

The bronze plaque is dedicated to Matthew Alexander Henson, co-discoverer of the North Pole with Robert Edwin Peary and the first man to actually set foot on that gelid spot.

The unveiling of the memorial tablet to the Maryland-born explorer marked the end of fifteen years' effort by another Marylander, Herbert M. Frisby, to gain official recognition for Henson.

Mr. Frisby, who retired last year as head of the science department of Baltimore's Douglass High School, has made seventeen trips north of the Arctic Circle and in 1957 was the only English-speaking person on an International Geophysical Year Arctic expedition to Spitsbergen, off the coast of Norway.

### Strongbox Dropped

In 1956 Mr. Frisby was flown over the North Pole and dropped a strongbox containing an American flag and a plaque in Henson's honor. The Baltimore Negro thus became the second member of his race to go to the Pole.

Mr. Frisby's interest in the career of Matthew Henson, of whom he later became both biographer and friend, began in the sixth grade when a geography teacher introduced him to the exploits of Peary and Henson.

It was then that he decided he had to go to the North Pole. While at Howard University he

spent his summers playing jazz piano, always trying to get jobs in Canada so he could be as close to the Pole as possible.

In the cellar of Mr. Frisby's home is a museum containing furs, Eskimo artifacts and souvenirs of his travels in Arctic regions.

### Value Of Collection

Although the educator and traveler estimates the value of his collection at \$50,000, his most treasured items are not in his home. They are the artifacts of Matthew Henson, which Frisby secured from Henson's widow and presented to Morgan State College.

Henson himself spent much of his life in obscurity. When he died in New York in 1955 at the age of 88 there were few people who knew that he was one of the two men who planted the American flag at the North Pole in 1909.

Four years after the discovery, Henson was working in a Brooklyn parking garage. A friend got him a job as a messenger in the New York Customs House. He reluctantly retired from the job at 70 on a pension of \$1,020 a year, sorry because the sum did not permit his wife to retire with him.

Matthew Henson was born in a log shack near Nanjemoy, Charles county, three years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

### Baltimore Jack

When he was 11 he ran away from home to escape an unloving stepmother. He got a job in a Washington restaurant and irregularly attended the N. Street Elementary School. The boy

heard sea tales from an old sailor named Baltimore Jack, and, after a year in the Capital, the youth walked to Baltimore, where he shipped as cabin boy on a schooner commanded by a Captain Childs.

Captain Childs taught Henson simple mathematics and the rudiments of navigation. Five years a sailor, he came ashore and got a job in a Washington hat store. There, he met young Lieutenant Peary, who hired him as a man-of-all-work for an expedition to Nicaragua. Henson became so valuable that Peary named him his assistant.

After the Nicaraguan expedition came six fruitless attempts to reach the North Pole. On one trip Henson saved Peary's life when he was attacked by a musk ox; another time he rescued Peary from starvation.

### "Most Valuable Companion"

Said Peary of Henson: "He is my most valuable companion. I could not get along without him."

On the day the Pole was finally reached, Peary sent Henson forward to make final observations. Peary himself was unable to walk, for Henson had been forced to amputate Peary's frozen toes with an ax to prevent gangrene.

Three-quarters of an hour later Peary arrived on a dog sled and confirmed the discovery of the North Pole.

Peary received many honors for his conquest and was promoted to rear admiral. Henson was praised for his skill and courage and for his mastery of the Eskimo language (Peary never learned it), but a lecture tour arranged for him failed to



**MATTHEW A. HENSON**  
Maryland-Born Arctic Explorer

attract audiences and his book, "A Negro Explorer at the North Pole," sold hardly any copies.

### At White House

The world forgot about Henson until Herbert Frisby decided to remind it of the explorer's existence.

Mr. Frisby's efforts succeeded, and on April 6, 1954, Matthew Henson stood in the White House and heard himself commended by the President of the United States.

The old man had his picture taken with Mr. Eisenhower before a big globe, pointing to the place where he and Peary had stood 45 years ago to the day.

Such was the ironic climax to the life of the first man who walked over the top of the world.