

# Explorers' Arctic Offspring Descend on D.C.

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From the frigid villages of northernmost Greenland to the steamy city of Washington they came, a startling and somewhat scandalous footnote to history.

The out-of-wedlock sons of Cmdr. Robert E. Peary, widely credited with discovering the North Pole in 1909, and Matthew Henson, his black assistant who may actually have reached the pole first, arrived here Monday night, along with nine of their progeny.

For the two 80-year-old sons, their visit yesterday to Peary's grave at Arlington National Cemetery and one scheduled tomorrow to Henson's Charles County birthplace, are milestones in their days-old journey from remote villages of northern Greenland to the heat, hustle and bustle of metropolitan life.

They came by bus from Boston, after their first airplane flight on their first trip away from their Arctic homeland. While they speak little English—they speak mostly an Eskimo language—they look very much like other tourists, wearing blue jeans, shirts and sport jackets and snapping photographs. Through interpreters, they marveled at the highways, trees and buildings.

But unlike other tourists they were honored by a message from President Reagan and had a beef, sushi and jumbo shrimp reception, complete with a classical string quartet, at the Washington Convention Center. District Mayor Marion Barry proclaimed yesterday Matthew Henson day.

Around an igloo made of ice the explorers' sons and grandsons drank colas, posed for Polaroid photographs and signed autographs. Some of the relatives only spoke enough English to say "no," they could not speak English.

Karree Peary, Cmdr. Peary's son, who used to hunt walrus, whale, polar bear and fox back home, said he had never seen so many people, such big roads or such large "igloos."

But not all members of the Peary clan are thrilled with the visit. Edward Stafford, a Peary grandson and retired civil servant who lives on Kent Island, said he thought the people were being exploited. "It just smacks of media hype."

Stafford said his grandfather's infidelity and paternity were known in the family. "Obviously, it's not something you talk about because it was very hurtful to my grandmother," he said. On a trip north in 1932, Stafford said he met some of his Eskimo cousins, and, he said, his "Uncle Bob" met his half-brother in 1926.

"Henson and Peary were up there at one time for four years," Stafford said. "It's a miracle there was only one descendant of each. Human beings are human. You can't send a man into a situation like that and expect otherwise."

But the explorers' sons Ahnaukaq Henson and Karree Peary were undaunted. They attended a gravesite ceremony for Peary at Arlington National Cemetery that one of Ahnaukaq Henson's sons filmed with a videotape camera.

At the cemetery, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Chase Untermyer read a message from President Reagan saluting both explorers and welcoming the descendants "of these two great Americans" to Washington.

Speaking through an interpreter, the old man spoke of their respective fathers. Henson said his was "a great hunter, a leader." Peary said his father was "a very nice man . . . He's dead, he's resting."

It had been their lifelong dream to visit the land of their fathers, said Dr. S. Allen Counter, an associate professor of neuroscience, director of the Harvard Foundation and the man who partly financed and put together what he has called a "North Pole Family Reunion."

For Counter, 39, "Henson was simply my hero."

Counter said he suspected Henson, who had no children by his wife, had left a human legacy in the Arctic after he learned from Scandinavian colleagues of dark-skinned Eskimos in northern Greenland.

Last year, Counter visited the tiny villages where Ahnaukaq and Karree lived. (Their last names are a recent addition.) The two men had lived in the same village for 15 years before Karree's mother moved 90 miles away.

Henson met Peary in 1888 and went with him on every Arctic expedition. Stafford said Henson was "a good man, a loyal and competent assistant, originally hired as a servant, but he rose above that." Counter described Henson as "codiscoverer" of the North Pole.

Counter said Henson, who was single when he fathered Ahnaukaq, shared his secret with close friends. Both men saw their children on a subsequent expedition but never thereafter wrote or maintained contact, Counter said. Karree said he never had any contact with his father's family.

In contrast to the mixed reaction from the Pearys, Henson family members have been uniformly enthusiastic about the visit, Counter said. Some of the American Henson relatives were on hand at Arlington yesterday, but no American Pearys were present as tie-wearing Karree laid a wreath at his father's grave. He told those on hand he had come "to honor Cmdr. Peary."