

Anaukaq Henson, Eskimo son of black explorer

Anaukaq Henson, the Eskimo son of Maryland-born Matthew Henson, the black man who accompanied Commander Robert E. Peary on the pair's pioneer exploration of the North Pole in 1909, died June 25 at his home in northwest Greenland at the age of 80. SUN

His death came less than a month after he visited the birth place of his father in the Charles County town of Nanjemoy. Mr. Henson, whose trip to the United States to see his relatives also took him to Cambridge, Mass., told hosts there before he left that he had completed his mission in life. He said he was going home to die and to sleep next to his wife, Aviaq, who is buried on a hill overlooking their native settlement.

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On the day he died, Mr. Henson took a brisk walk through the settlement, returned to his dwelling, lay down and said he was "ready to go."

Early last month Mr. Henson and Karree Peary, another aged Eskimo from Northern Greenland, visited a wooded area of Southern Maryland a few miles from the warm currents of the Potomac River, tracing their family roots.

The two pilgrims, who said they were the illegitimate sons of the famed North Pole explorers, were seeking the foundations of the elder Mr. Henson's birthplace in the woods near the small community of Nanjemoy in the southwestern corner of the county.

The visit was part of a journey undertaken by a dozen or so Northern Greenland natives in which they met Peary's American descendants in New York and Boston, visited Henson's burial place in Woodlawn Cemetery in New York, attended a dinner and reception at Harvard University and laid a wreath at Peary's grave in Washington's Arlington National Cemetery.

In Maryland, the Charles County Commissioners gathered at the county courthouse, where they presented Mr. Henson and the rest of the visiting members of the Henson and Peary clans with plaques and flags. A variety of politicians took the opportunity to laud the famed black explorer, the elder Henson. SUN

The Henson and Peary clans of Greenland were an Arctic legacy left behind by the explorers after their journey to the top of the world in 1909. But it was only last year that Dr. S. Allen Counter, director of the Harvard Foundation, traveled to Greenland to solve a puzzle that had been bothering historians ever since. Peary and Henson made their final push to the North Pole: When the expedition was within striking distance of the pole in April 1909, why had Perry ordered five white explorers to stay behind while he and Henson pressed on to the final destination?

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Anaukaq Henson ES

Anaukaq Henson, an Eskimo who said he was the son of Maryland-born polar explorer Matthew Henson, died June 25 at his home in northwest Greenland at the age of 80.

His death came less than a month after he visited the Charles County birthplace of Matthew Henson, the black man who accompanied Cmdr. Robert E. Peary on the pioneer exploration of the North Pole in 1909. Mr. Henson said before leaving the United States that he had completed his mission in life. He said he was going home to die and be buried next to his wife, Aviaq, on a hill overlooking their native settlement.

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Early last month, Mr. Henson and Karree Peary, a Eskimo who said he is the son of Robert Peary, met Commander's Peary's American descendants in New York and Boston, visited Matthew Henson's burial place in Woodlawn Cemetery in New York, attended a dinner and reception at Harvard University and laid a wreath at Commander Peary's grave in Washington's Arlington National Cemetery.

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nal push to the North Pole: When the expedition was within striking distance of the pole in April 1909, why had Commander Perry ordered five white explorers to stay behind while he and Matthew Henson pressed on to the final destination?

Evening Sun
Last year, Professor Counter said, he found what he considered "at least part of the equation." The professor had first heard of a dark-skinned race of Eskimos called "Kulnoctoto" from Scandinavian colleagues in 1977 and he wanted to travel to Greenland to explore the possibility that they were Matthew Henson's descendants.

As Professor Counter and an interpreter walked through the Qaanaaq village on Greenland's Inglefield Bay last August, a dark-skinned Eskimo man came out of his house and declared, "You must be [a] Henson and you've come looking for me."

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Professor Counter, who is black, realized the man's assumption was based on the color of his skin. The smiling Eskimo turned out to be Anaukaq Henson. In a village 90 miles north of Qaanaaq, Professor Counter found Karree Peary, the man who said he was a Peary descendant.

JUL 13 1987
The two explorers, Professor Counter reasoned, had shared a secret. During their six attempts to conquer the Pole, they had fathered Eskimo children. EVENING SUN