Albert Abraham Michelson Encyclopedia Article

Albert Abraham Michelson

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1852-1931

American physicist best known for inventing the interferometer (1881) and for his 1887 experiments with Edward Morley that failed to detect the motion of Earth relative to the ether—a hypothetical substance most nineteenth-century physicists believed necessary for light propagation. This "null-result" was later explained by Albert Einstein's special theory of relativity. Michelson was awarded the 1907 Nobel Prize for Physics for his high-precision optical instruments and measurements carried out with their aid.