Matthew Alexander Henson Encyclopedia Article

Matthew Alexander Henson

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Contents

Matthew Alexander Henson Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Matthew Alexander Henson.....3

Matthew Alexander Henson

1866-1955

American explorer who, with Matthew Peary, was the first American to reach the North Pole. Henson ran away from home at age 12, lying about his age to go to sea as a crew member. He received an informal education and, later, became a vital member of several expeditions of exploration to Greenland and the Arctic. In 1909, with Matthew Peary, he reached the North Pole. Unfortunately, his accomplishment was not recognized for several decades, in part because Henson was an African American.