Admiral Peary's Chronology

1856 - Peary was born in Creson, PA, only son of Charles and Mary Webster (Wiley) Peary. Charles died in 1859 and was buried in Brown Hill Cemetery, South Portland where Peary and his mother came to reside.

1869 to 1873 - Peary attended and graduated from Portland High School. He and his mother had moved to 119 Oxford St. at the base of Munjoy Hill

1873 to 1877 - Peary attended Bowdoin College having received the Brown Memorial Scholarship. He majored in Civil Engineering. He graduated second in rank in a class of 54 students (Phi Beta Kappa).

1877 to 1879 - He and his mother moved to Fryeburg where he was the town surveyor and well known taxidermist.

1879 - Peary moved to Washington, DC where after competitive examinations, he had received an appointment as a draftsman for the U S Coast and Geodetic Survey.

1881 - Peary applied for and received an appointment to the Civil Engineering Corps of the United States Navy and became a Lieutenant. The exam was not a cake-walk. It extended over ten days of eight hour periods.

1884 to 1885 - Peary was second in command of the first survey of the Nicaraguan Canal Route. Peary also did the preliminary design of the locks with some unique features.

1886 - Peary made his first expedition to Greenland where he made a 100 mile penetration of the ice cap and developed a fund of information to be used on later expeditions. Accompanied by Maigaard, a Dane.

1887 - 1888 Peary was again second in command of the second Nicaraguan Canal Survey. Matthew Henson accompanied Peary on this trip.

1888 - Peary married Josephine Cecilia Diebitsch after a 6 year tumultuous courtship.

1891 - Peary made his second expedition to explore north Greenland taking Josephine with him. She stayed at his base on Whale Sound in Northwest Greenland while he traveled 1300 miles over the ice cap to the north establishing that Greenland was an island.

1893 to 1894 - Peary’s third expedition to explore north Greenland with Josephine. She bore their first child Marie Ahnighto (the Snow Baby) Sept. 12, 1893. The attempt of 1894 ended early because of adverse weather conditions.

1895 - Peary, Lee, and Henson traveled in North Greenland 600 miles but were forced back because of low provisions. Before leaving for home they were able to find and bring back 2 meteorites, “The Woman” 5500 pounds and “The Dog” 1000 pounds on display at Museum of Natural History, New York City.

1896 - Peary attempted to bring back “The Tent” 100 Ton meteoriite but was thwarted by an early change in the weather.

1897 - Peary returned and this time succeeded in getting the meteorite aboard the ship. Being magnetic, the return trip was very difficult without the use of a compass. The “Tent” is also at the Museum of Natural History.

1898 to 1902 - Peary made his fifth and sixth expeditions and with great difficulty established his most northernmost depot at Fort Conger. He lost 8 toes to frostbite but continued. In 1902 Peary reached a latitude 84 17’ 27”, the farthest north of any man but had to turn back because of low supplies.

1903 - Robert E. Peary Jr. was born in Washington, DC on Sept 29th.

1905 to 1906 - Having designed his own ship, the powerful “Roosevelt” as well as most of the expedition’s equipment, Peary was able to force his way north through the pack ice to the north side of Ellesmere Island at Cape Sheridan.He reached 87 6’ 00” but had to turn back due to low supplies and large open leads.

1908 to 1909 - Completely refitted, Peary led his party of 6 teams north from Cape Sheridan and this time the weather was kinder and the open leads not so difficult. Peary’s team consisting of Matthew Henson and four Eskimos reached the pole on April 6, 1909.

1911 - Congress passed legislation giving the nation’s thanks to Peary, promoted him to Rear Admiral and placed him on the retired list.

1910 to 1914 The house on Eagle Island was modernized and expanded.

1916 Having studied the airplane carefully, Peary recognized the importance of aircraft for exploration and military purposes. He was among the first to seek the creation of a Dept. of Aeronautics separate from the Navy and Army. Through a 20 city fund raising tour, Peary raised $250,000 for the Aerial Coastal Patrol and established four bases on the East Coast which were in operation during the latter half of World War 1.

1917 - Peary was diagnosed as having pernicious anemia untreatable at the time.

1920 - Peary died at his Washington home on February 20, 1920 and was buried with full honors in Arlington National Cemetery with a large globe monument honoring his many achievements. Josephine, his remarkable supporting wife, died Dec. 19. 1955 and is buried beside him. Matthew Henson, his able assistant of many years, is also buried here.