



## Dr. Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander: An Advocate for Civil and Human Rights

By: [Hanne-Lore M. Gambrell](#)



### Dr. Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander

#### ACHIEVEMENTS

1927: First African-American to hold both Ph.D. and J.D. degrees.

1927: First African-American woman to enroll and earn a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

1943: First woman to hold a national office in the National Bar Association.

This month we feature the achievements of Dr. Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, an advocate for civil and human rights, and the first African American woman to practice law in Pennsylvania.

There is no question that Sadie Alexander overcame numerous, incredible, and tiring obstacles as she earned multiple degrees as an African American woman in the early 1900's. In 1927, she became the first African American woman to be admitted as an attorney to the Pennsylvania bar. Yet, her story does not start there. Sadie Alexander's father was also an attorney, as was her husband. In fact, Sadie Alexander came from a rich history of professionals: her grandfather, Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner, was an editor of the Christian Recorder and the AME Church Review; her uncle, Dr. Nathan F. Mossell, was a surgeon and the founder of the Frederick Douglass Hospital (now known as Mercy-Douglass Hospital); her aunt, Dr. Hallie Tanner Johnson, founded Tuskegee Institute's Nurses' School & Hospital; and her uncle, Lewis Baxter Moore, served as the Dean of Howard University.

As a lifelong leader and pioneer, Sadie Alexander is a woman of many distinguished honors: she is the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. in economics; she served as the first national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.; she was the first African American woman enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, graduating with honors; she was the first African American to hold both a Ph.D. and J.D.

Sadie Alexander worked alongside her husband, one of the premier husband and wife legal teams in the country. She advocated fiercely against racial discrimination, segregation and employment inequality. She even formed a legal aid society to aid African Americans who could not otherwise afford counsel. No doubt in recognition of her talent, tenacity and strength, President Harry Truman appointed Sadie Alexander to serve on his Committee for Human Rights in 1947. Living an incredible life that deserves honor and admiration, Sadie Alexander died at the age of 91.

Source: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/alexander-sadie-tanner-mossell-1898-1989/>.

**Collective Experience. Collaborative Culture. Creative Solutions.**

388 South Main Street, Suite 500, Akron, OH 44311  
600 Superior Avenue East, Suite 1600, Cleveland, OH 44114  
1415 Panther Lane, Suite 138, Naples, FL 34109  
300 Madison Avenue, Suite 1000, Toledo, OH 43604  
6550 Seville Drive, Suite B, Canfield, OH 44406

© 2020 Brouse McDowell, A Legal Professional Association | [www.brouse.com](http://www.brouse.com)

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.