

**ADDRESS: 700 WESTVIEW AVE**

Name of Resource: Sadie T.M. Alexander House

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Margaret S Shapiro & Howard Steven Bilofsky

Nominator: Nika Faulkner, Historical Commission intern

Staff Contact: Kim Chantry, kim.chantry@phila.gov

**OVERVIEW:** This nomination proposes to designate the property at 700 Westview Avenue as historic and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination contends that the property is significant under Criterion A for its association with civil rights pioneers Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander and her husband Raymond Pace Alexander, who purchased the property in 1959. Among her many accomplishments, Sadie T.M. Alexander was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in economics in the United States, the first woman to receive a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, and the first Black woman to practice law in Pennsylvania. Raymond Pace Alexander gained prominence as a civil rights attorney, representing black defendants in high-profile cases including the Trenton Six, and went on to have a successful political and judicial career.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 700 Westview Avenue satisfies Criterion for Designation A.



# NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT

## PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

### PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)  
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

#### 1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE *(must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)*

Street address: 700 Westview Avenue

Postal code: 19119

#### 2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Sadie T.M. Alexander House

Current/Common Name: Sadie T.M. Alexander House

#### 3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

#### 4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☒ excellent ☐ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Private Residence

#### 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.*

#### 6. DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.*

#### 7. SIGNIFICANCE

*Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.*

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1959 to 1985

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1915

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Unknown

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: George F. Payne & Co.

Original owner: Edwin R. Winner

Other significant persons: Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander & Raymond Pace Alexander

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:**

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☒ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☐ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☐ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☐ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

**8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

*Please attach a bibliography.*

**9. NOMINATOR**

Organization Philadelphia Historical Commission Date 3/28/2022

Name with Title Nika Faulkner Email preservation@phila.gov

Street Address 1515 Arch St., 13th Floor Telephone 215-686-7660

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19102

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: 3/28/2022

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 5/10/2022

Date of Notice Issuance: 5/12/2022

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Margaret S Shapiro & Howard Steven Bilofsky

Address: 700 Westview Ave.

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19119

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

NOMINATION  
FOR THE  
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



The Sadie T.M. Alexander House

700 Westview Avenue

Constructed 1915

Mount Airy

Philadelphia, PA 19119

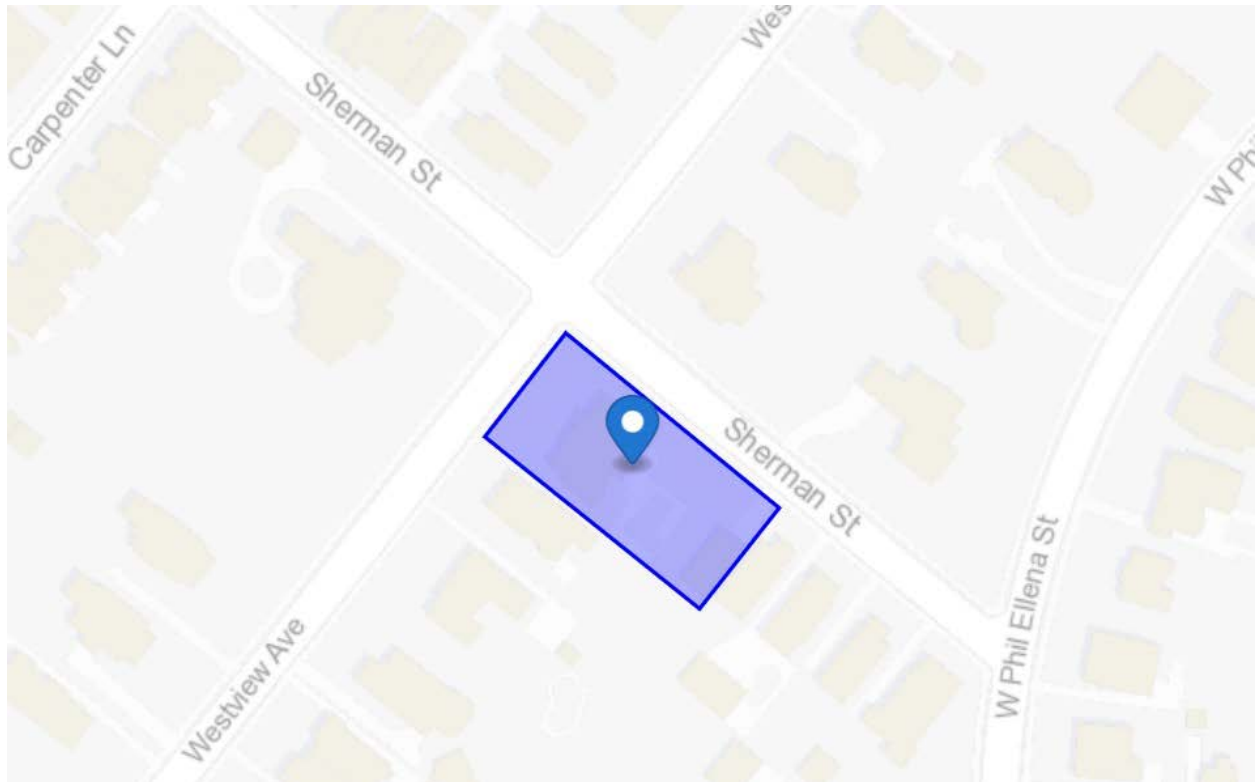


Figure 1. Boundary map. Source: Atlas.

**Period of Significance:** 1959-1985

**Boundary Description:** Beginning at a point formed by the intersection of the southeast side of Westview Avenue and the southwest side of Sherman Street, thence extending along the said southwest side of Sherman Street southeast 210 feet to a point, thence extending southwest 99 feet 5 ½ inches to a point, thence extending northwest 209 feet 11 ¾ inches to a point on the said southeast side of Westview Avenue, hence extending along the said southeast side of Westview Avenue northeast 100 feet 7 3/8" inches to the first mentioned point and place of beginning. Being 700 Westview Avenue.





Figure 2. View across the street from the subject property. Source: Google.

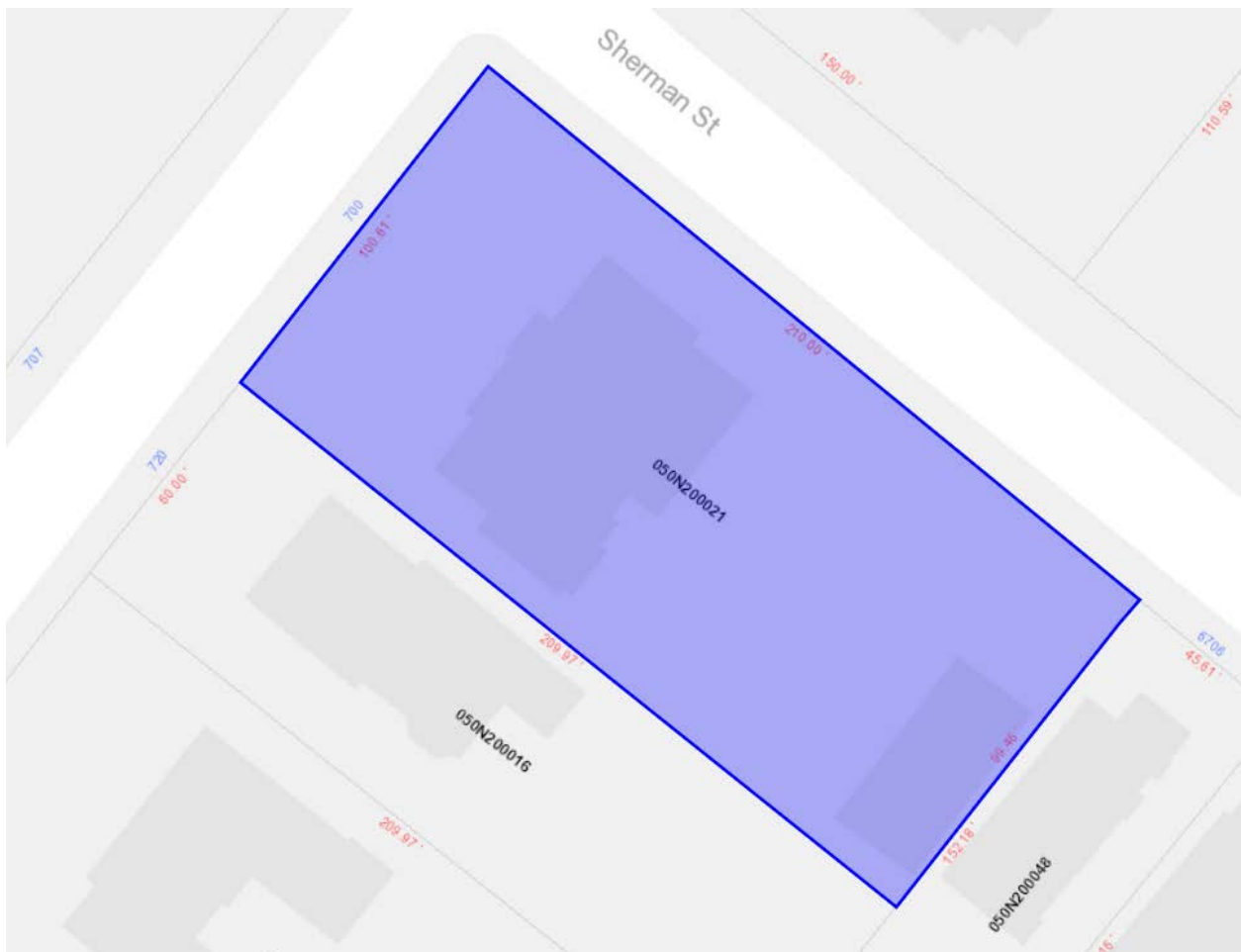


Figure 3. Building footprint and property boundaries. Source: Atlas.

## Building Description

### General

700 Westview Avenue is located in the neighborhood of Mount Airy, formerly part of Germantown, in Northwest Philadelphia. The Sadie T.M. Alexander house is an early-20<sup>th</sup> century Tudor Revival design, and is surrounded by other late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century revival style residences including Colonial, Greek, Queen Anne, and, as in the case of this building, Tudor Revival. The building is set back from Westview Avenue, tucked behind a large lawn and a few large trees. A garden wraps from the corner of Sherman Street and Westview Avenue around the perimeter of the building. An ashlar stone path cuts through the front lawn, connecting the sidewalk to the main entry. The house is 1.5 stories, with a steeply pitched roof and overhanging eaves.

From the primary elevation, the house appears to be front-gabled with two wings that extend in opposite directions. The Atlas map (Figure 3) shows the true plan, which is irregular and densely packed, in a typical Romantic fashion. A detached garage behind the main house along Sherman Street was constructed to match the central portion of the house. The central bay (the material of which which follows from front to back,) is faced in false half-timbering, with the beams in a dark grey-green and the infill stucco in a lighter shade of grey-green. This scheme of half-timbering flanked by stone is continued from the front to the back of the house. While the color choices may not be original, these elements are typical of the Tudor-Revival Style. The two flanking bays are constructed with coursed-ashlar stone. The roof is finished with rectangular slate shingles across the building. All stone corners are detailed with larger quoins. Window and door surrounds, all of which are wood, are painted to match the half-timbering.

### Primary (Westview Avenue) Elevation



*Figure 4. Front elevation along Westview Avenue.*

Facing the building from Westview Avenue, there are three bays, two cladd in stone on either end, and false half-timbered wood in the center. Beginning with the coursed stone bay to the northeast, bordering Sherman Street, a brick chimney aligned to the Sherman Street façade rises just above the



ridge of the roof. The sloping roof comes down to the top of the first level, below which is a ribbon of three double-hung, four-over-four windows. Centered above is a gabled dormer rising from the slate shingle, including a smaller double-hung, eight-over-eight window.

Moving south, the central bay is composed of front-facing nested gables. This includes one smaller, single-story gabled section containing the entry to the northwest, and a larger two-story gabled section to the southwest. The roofline of the larger gable follows the pitch of the smaller gable as it rises a floor higher. A simple cornice finishes both portions of this block, with a line of subtle dentils along the front-facing gables.<sup>1</sup> This detail is unique to the primary elevation. The smaller gabled portion of the half-timbered block sits atop two stone steps and a small entry porch. A dark, warm-toned, arched and panelled wooden door exists centrally atop a brass kickplate, flanked by two small windows at eye-level. The windows are obscured with turned wood ballusters providing privacy to the interior. A metal sconce hangs above the door. The second double-height block to the southwest includes two ribbons of four double-hung four-over-four windows, one atop the next. Along the southmost side of the central bay is double-flue brick chimney, taller than the one along Sherman Street.

The southwestern (southernmost) stone bay projects from the central half-timbered bay, and is arranged much like the northernmost bay. Though set back slightly away from Westview Avenue, this bay is also side-gabled, finished with a slate roof, and includes a ribbon of three double-hung, four-over-four windows. This block however, does not include a dormer.



Figure 5. Sherman Street side façade.

---

<sup>1</sup> McAlester, Virginia. *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.



### Side (Sherman Street) Elevation

Obscured behind a line of trees and shrubbery, the Sherman Street façade is clad entirely in coursed stone. There are three bays, each different from one another. Closest to Westview Avenue, to the northwest, a gabled bay includes a projecting bay window at the ground floor, aligned closer to the northwest corner. A small double-hung window sits beside it to the east. The projecting semi-octagonal bay window's roof is clad in slate tile, just as the primary roof. Each window in the bay window are the typical double-hung, four-over-four type seen across the house. A set of the same double-hung, four-over-four windows exists above as well. This bay ends to the northwest in the previously mentioned double-flue chimney. At this elevation, one can see the base of the chimney is stone, but as it rises above the roof, is constructed in red-painted brick.

The central bay is side-gabled, with a hipped dormer piercing the sloping roof. On the first level, a fixed window is flanked by a casement window on either side. All windows in this bay seem to be contemporary additions based on the fact that they are without muntins and differ from other window types present on the building.



*Figure 6. View from Sherman Street of side and rear of property.*

The eaves of the final bay adjacent to the backyard continue down about a foot further than the previous bay. Below them are a set of the typical double-hung, four-over-four windows. As the house terminates to the northeast, a shoulder-height stone wall projects from the building and meets a wooden gate. The gate is at the top of a stone path that allows access from the back yard to the sidewalk. A set of brick and stone lined stairs connect the sidewalk on Sherman Street to the path, which leads you to the gate and backyard beyond. The backyard's perimeter is lined with an unfinished

wooden fence matching the aforementioned gate. An original low, stone wall exists in front of the fence along the sidewalk. Shrubs and greenery are planted between the two and cascade down over the stone to the street level. At the end of the fence along Sherman Street, the garage is accessible via a short driveway.



*Figure 7. Detached garage on Sherman Street.*

## Statement of Significance

The property at 700 Westview Avenue is historically significant and should be listed individually on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The property satisfies Criterion for Designation A as delineated in Section 14-1004(1) of the Philadelphia Code; it “is associated with the life of a person significant in the past,” Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898-1989) and her husband Raymond Pace Alexander (1897-1974), who purchased 700 Westview Avenue in 1959.<sup>2</sup> The Alexanders were trailblazers in the fields of education and law, and were highly active in civil rights both locally and nationally.

Sadie T.M. Alexander deserves particular attention for her perseverance and achievements. In 1921, she became the first Black woman in the United States to graduate with a Ph.D. in Economics, which she earned at the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>3</sup> Three years later, in 1924, she became the first Black woman to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. In a third display of incredible firsts, in 1927, she was the first Black woman to gain admission to the Pennsylvania bar, which began her long

career advocating for civil rights.<sup>4</sup> While practicing law with her husband Raymond Pace Alexander, she helped to make their practice one of the leading civil rights firms in Philadelphia. Serving on numerous government committees and commissions in addition to practicing law, her work went beyond private practice into the public realm.

While Sadie T.M. Alexander’s career and accomplishments alone would be significant enough for her home of 26 years at 700 Westview Avenue to satisfy Criterion for Designation A, the significance of the site is further bolstered by her shared success with husband Raymond Pace Alexander.



*Figure 8. "Mrs. & Mr. Raymond Pace Alexander at home at 700 Westview St. Germantown." October 27, 1964. Source: George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Collection, Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center.*

<sup>2</sup> 1959 deed for 700 Westview Avenue, Deed book CAB 1210 page 396.

<sup>3</sup> "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898-1989) Historical Marker." Explorepahistory.com. Accessed March 20, 2022. <https://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-282>.

<sup>4</sup> Carla Garner, "Sadie T. M. Alexander (1898-1989)." Blackpast.org. Black Past, November 29, 2020. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/alexander-sadie-tanner-mossell-1898-1989/>; "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Papers," Penn Libraries University Archives and Records Center, <https://archives.upenn.edu/collections/finding-aid/upt50a374s/>.



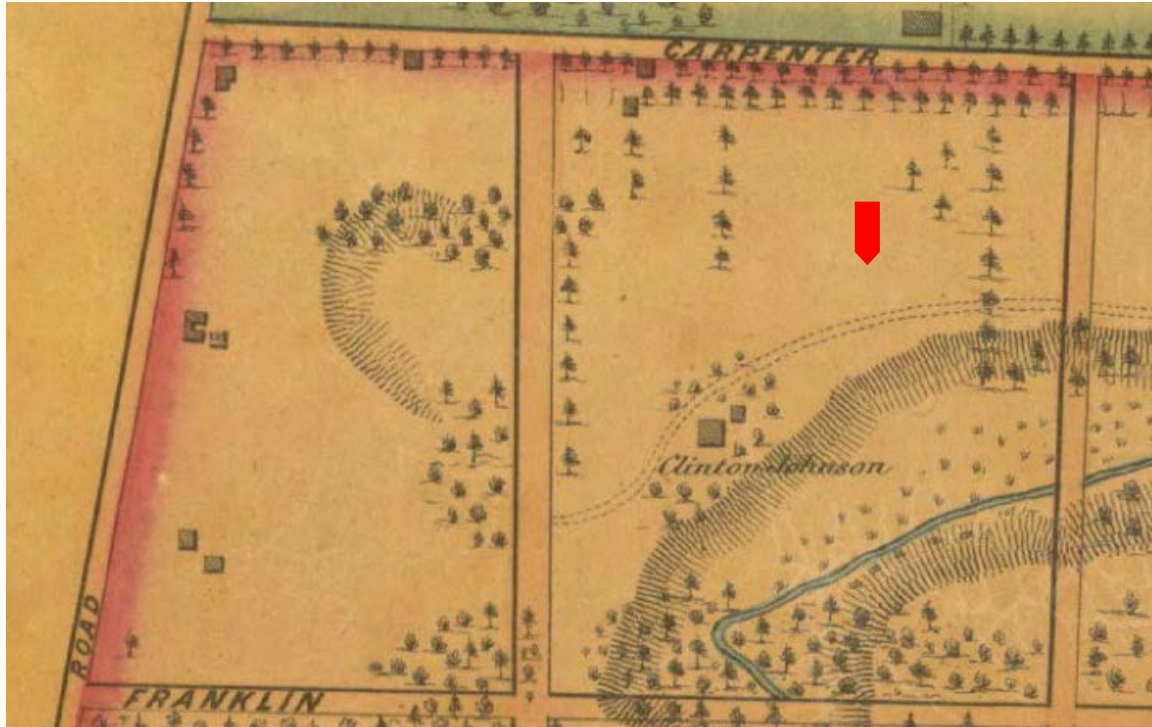


Figure 9: Detail of the 1851 Map of the Township of Germantown, Philadelphia County, Penna., A.E. Rodgerson and E.J. Murphy, Civil Engineers. The approximate location of what is now 700 Westview Avenue is demarcated in red. Source: Germantown Historical Society, available on the Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

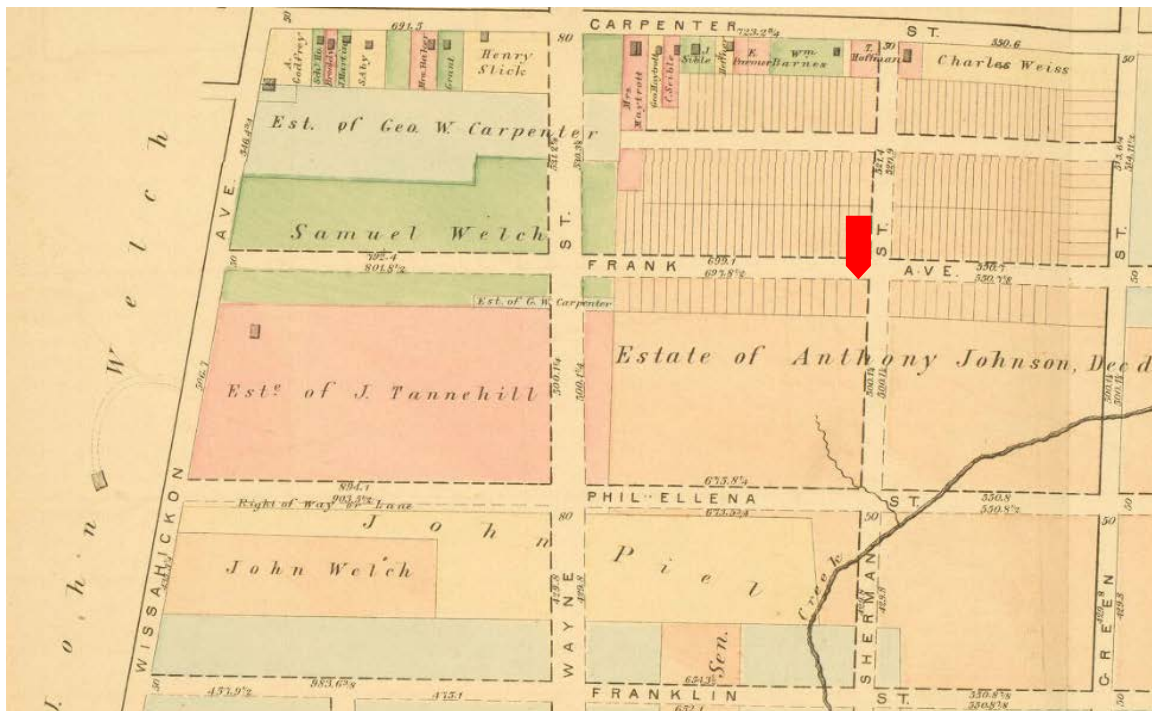


Figure 10: Detail of Hopkins' Atlas of the Late Borough of Germantown, 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward, City of Philadelphia, 1871, showing platted land and roads, most of which had not yet been constructed. The name Frank Avenue (now Westview Avenue) was changed in 1889. In 1840, John Welch (shown on the map as John Welch) purchased Spring Bank on the southwest side (shown on the far left of the map) of Wissahickon Avenue. He continued to assemble additional property across Wissahickon Avenue in the next few decades, including a portion of the estate of Anthony Johnson in 1873, encompassing what would become 700 Westview Avenue. Source: Athenaeum of Philadelphia, available on the Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.



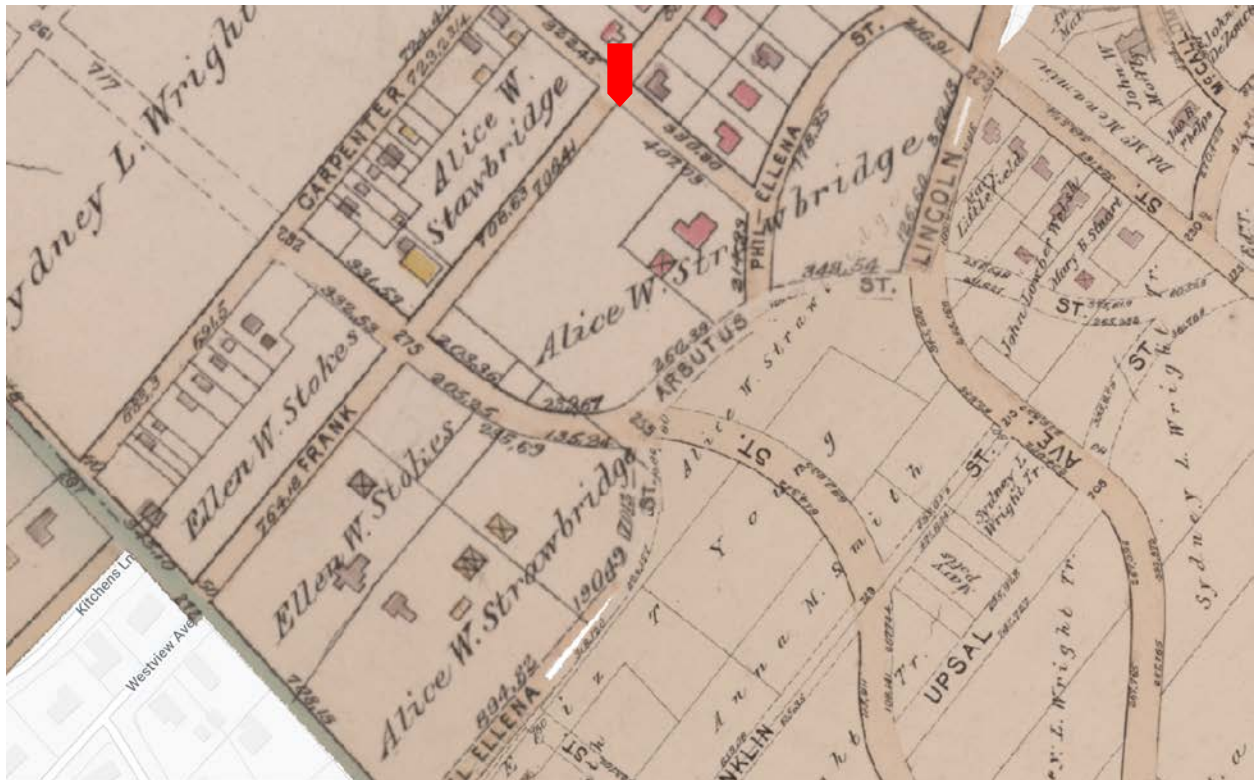


Figure 11: 1895 G.W. Bromley Atlas showing the portion of Alice W. Strawbridge's large estate including what would become 700 Westview Avenue, marked in red.

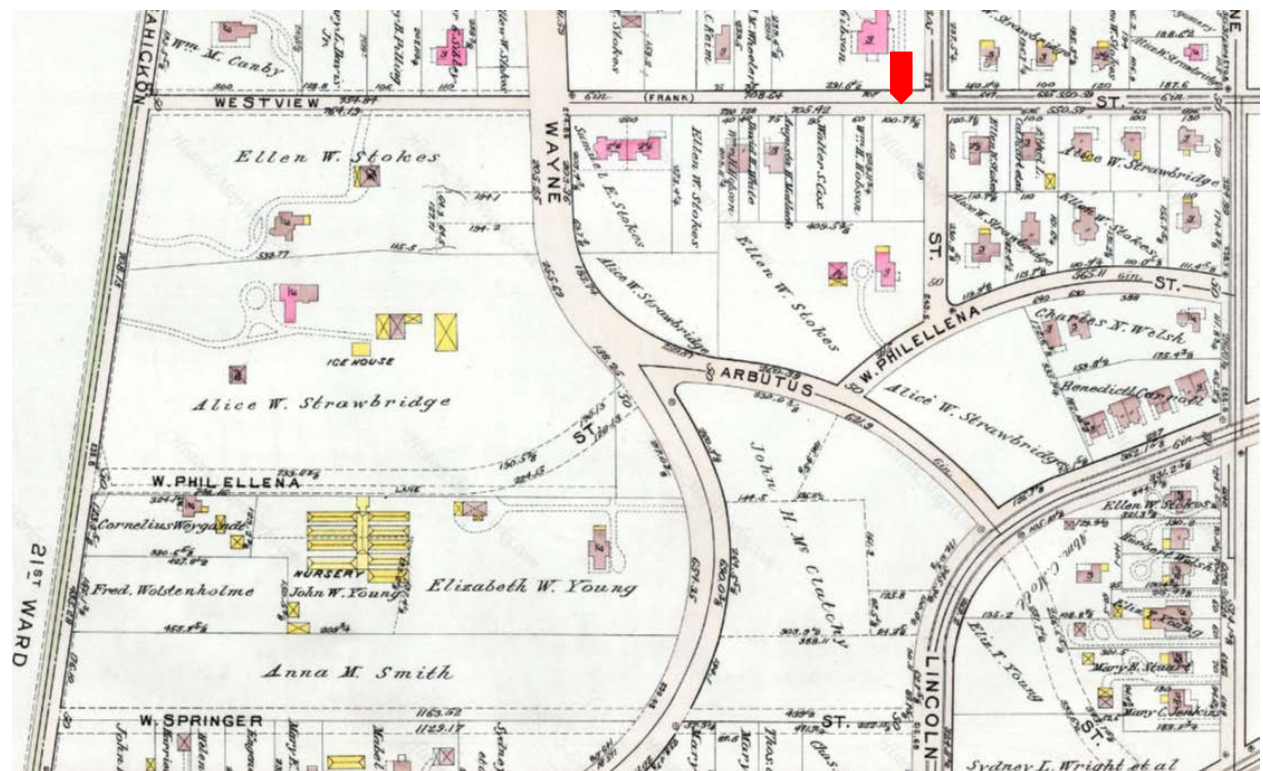
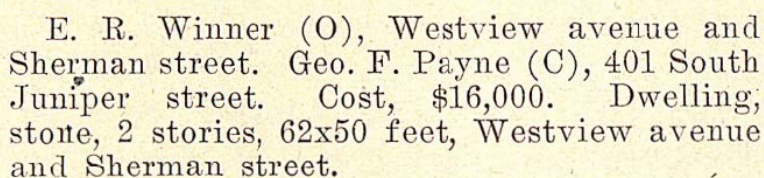


Figure 12: 1911 G.W. Bromley Atlas, Ward 22, showing the subdivision and early 20th century development of the Welsh/Strawbridge/Stokes estate. Source: Historic Map Works.

## Site History

700 Westview Street was constructed in 1915 for Edwin R. Winner on a parcel subdivided from the estate of Alice W. Strawbridge (nee Welsh), the daughter of John Welsh (1805-1886), a prominent landowner and minister to England, and wife of George Strawbridge, a member of another large land-owning family in Germantown.<sup>5</sup> In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, John Welsh assembled a significant amount of property around Wissahickon Avenue and Frank Street (now Westview Avenue), taking up residence in and adding to William Rittenhouse's 18<sup>th</sup> century Spring Bank estate, and constructing homes for three of his daughters, Alice Welsh Strawbridge, Ellen Welsh Stokes, and Elizabeth Welsh Young on land nearby.<sup>6</sup> After their father's death in 1886, his sons and executors of his will, John Lowber Welsh, Samuel Welsh Jr., and Herbert Welsh, conveyed a large portion of the estate, including what would become 700 Westview Avenue, to Alice Strawbridge and Ellen Stokes, the latter of whom subsequently transferred her share to the Strawbridges in 1898.<sup>7</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Welsh sisters began subdividing and selling off their family land. After the death of her husband in 1914, Alice W. Strawbridge retired to Chestnut Hill. She sold the vacant parcel at 700 Westview Avenue to Edwin R. Winner the following year.

Edwin R. Winner had previously lived nearby in Germantown at the corner of Wissahickon Avenue and Coulter Street.<sup>8</sup> He worked as a private secretary to Joseph E. Widener, a prominent art collector in the area.<sup>9</sup> Winner purchased 700 Westview Avenue with the agreement that one house could be built on the property, and that it must cost more than \$10,000.<sup>10</sup> Winner commissioned a home from the well-known contractor George F. Payne (Figure 13). No architect is specified, but the resulting home was constructed in the Tudor Revival style, the characteristics of which are expressed to this day with little contemporary intervention, retaining much of the building's integrity.



E. R. Winner (O), Westview avenue and Sherman street. Geo. F. Payne (C), 401 South Juniper street. Cost, \$16,000. Dwelling; stone, 2 stories, 62x50 feet, Westview avenue and Sherman street.

Figure 13. *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 30, 9/1/1915, p. 563.

Winner remained the owner of 700 Westview Avenue until his death in 1926.

<sup>5</sup> "Alice (Welsh) Strawbridge." WikiTree, June 23, 2019. <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Welsh-975>; "Deed for parcel at corner of Westview Avenue & Sherman Street, Between Alice W. Strawbridge & Edwin R. Winner, ELT 529 222." City of Philadelphia. 1915.

<sup>6</sup> John Welsh was also interested in the development of Fairmount Park and was a member of the Fairmount Park Commission until his death, and played an important role in the Centennial Exhibition of 1876. "John Welsh," WikiTree, 19 Oct 2019. <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Welsh-976>; Samuel Fitch Hotchkin, "John Welsh" in *Ancient And Modern Germantown, Mount Airy and Chestnut Hill*, 1889, p. 330.

<sup>7</sup> Philadelphia Deed Book GGP 160 p. 404, John Lowber Welsh et al to Ellen Stokes and Alice W. Strawbridge, 1886; "Deed for parcel at corner of Westview Avenue & Sherman Street, Between Alice W. Strawbridge & Edwin R. Winner, ELT 529 222." City of Philadelphia. 1915.

<sup>8</sup> "The Latest News in Real Estate," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 22, 1903.

<sup>9</sup> "Widener On Stand Tells How He Got Prince's Paintings," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 28, 1925, 4.

<sup>10</sup> "Deed for parcel at corner of Westview Avenue & Sherman Street, Between Alice W. Strawbridge & Edwin R. Winner, ELT 529 222." City of Philadelphia. 1915.

Sadie T.M. and Raymond Race Alexander purchased the property in 1959 from Harry G. Parker, moving from a three-story rowhouse at 1708 Jefferson Street in North Philadelphia to the large single-family residence on a verdant lot in Mount Airy/Germantown.<sup>11</sup> Despite being in their early sixties and having already accomplished much in their lives and careers, the Alexanders continued to practice law together until Raymond Pace Alexander's death in 1974. Sadie T.M. Alexander remained in the home until 1985 at the age of 87.

### **Sadie T.M. Alexander and Raymond Pace Alexander**

Sadie Tanner Mossell was born on January 2, 1898 to Aaron and Mary Tanner Mossell in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her birth came 35 years after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, which freed enslaved people in the Confederate South, and decades before women were given the right to vote.<sup>12</sup> Her maternal grandfather was Benjamin Tucker Tanner (1835-1923), a Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Bishop Tanner had seven children, the best known of whom is the painter Henry O. Tanner (1859-1937). Another daughter of Bishop Tanner, Hallie Tanner Johnson, became a social worker and physician and established the Nurses' School and Hospital at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Sadie Tanner Mossell's father, Aaron A. Mossell (1863-1951) was the first African American to graduate from Penn's Law School. Her uncle, Nathan Francis Mossell (1856-1946) was the first African American to graduate from Penn's Medical School. In 1895 Dr. Mossell was a co-founder of the Frederick Douglass Hospital, which later merged with Mercy Hospital to form Mercy-Douglass.<sup>13</sup>

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued the same year Sadie's father was born. Two years later in 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery in the United States. The end of slavery did not end the racism that continued throughout Philadelphia and greater nation, contributing to the difficulty in finding employment for members of the African American community.<sup>14</sup> This was a hardship Sadie T.M. Alexander's father, Aaron Mossell, would become well aware of, despite his extensive education.

Aaron Mossell was the first African American to earn a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He went on to use his degree to become a prominent attorney and civil rights leader in Philadelphia,<sup>15</sup> but struggled to make a living owing to reluctance at that time of hiring a Black lawyer.<sup>16</sup> Aaron Mossell abandoned his wife and children when Sadie was just a baby.

---

<sup>11</sup> Prior to the Act of Consolidation of 1854, Germantown/German Township encompassed the communities now known as Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill. Mount Airy as a neighborhood name began to be used in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, taken from the 1750 country estate of William Allen, Chief Justice of colonial Pennsylvania. <https://mtairycdc.org/explore-mt-airy/mt-airy-history/#:~:text=%E2%80%99CMt,15%2C000%20acres%20from%20William%20Penn>

<sup>12</sup> Garner, "Sadie T. M. Alexander (1898-1989)."

<sup>13</sup> "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Papers," Penn Libraries University Archives and Records Center, <https://archives.upenn.edu/collections/finding-aid/upt50a374s/>.

<sup>14</sup> Geoff D. Zylstra, "Whiteness, Freedom, and Technology: The Racial Struggle over Philadelphia's Streetcars, 1859—1867." *Technology and Culture* 52, no. 4 (2011): 678–702. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23020522>.

<sup>15</sup> "Aaron Albert Mossell." Penn Libraries University Archives and Records Center. University of Pennsylvania, July 8, 2019. <https://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/aaron-albert-mossell>.

<sup>16</sup> "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898-1989) Historical Marker." *Explorepahistory.com*. Accessed March 20, 2022. <https://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-282>.



Following her father's departure from the family, Sadie Tanner Mossell's mother took her and her siblings to live with family in Washington, D.C. Sadie split her time between her aunt and uncle's home in Washington, D.C. and her grandparents' house in Philadelphia. While she did not grow up with her father present, the two share an alma mater. With her grandparents' financial support, she entered the University of Pennsylvania in 1915, the same year that her future home at 700 Westview Avenue was being constructed.

Sadie Tanner Mossell graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with an undergraduate degree in education in 1918, and immediately returned to pursue a graduate degree in economics.<sup>17</sup> For her doctoral dissertation, she analyzed the economic status of Philadelphia's Black population which had migrated from the south. This came two decades after W.E.B Du Bois' famous sociological study on African American life in Philadelphia.<sup>18</sup> In her dissertation, a young Sadie Tanner Mossell argued that segregation prevented Black citizens from prospering and fitting into the mainstream of American life.<sup>19</sup>

Looking back at her time at the University of Pennsylvania, she noted that she often felt invisible, but was determined to someday make everyone aware of her ability.<sup>20</sup> In 1920, she received one of her first professional awards, the Frances Sargeant Pepper Fellow in economics.<sup>21</sup>

Immediately after graduation as the first African American woman in the United States to earn a doctoral degree in economics, she found it difficult to find a job in Philadelphia despite her credentials. From 1921-1923, she worked as the assistant actuary for the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company in Durham, NC.<sup>22</sup> Though she struggled to find a job in Philadelphia, African Americans overall were carving out new paths to success, fighting to occupy more professional areas than ever before. There were new and growing possibilities for members of the Black community, even if that opportunity did not come easily.



Figure 14: Sadie Tanner Mossell photograph from her University of Pennsylvania scrapbook. Source: Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander's Student Scrapbook, 1919-1921, Papers,; 1817- 2005; (bulk, 1925-1983), <https://colenda.library.upenn.edu/catalog/81431-p3cv4c694>.

<sup>17</sup> "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Papers," Penn Libraries, University Archives and Records Center, <https://archives.upenn.edu/collections/finding-aid/upt50a374s/>.

<sup>18</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, first published 1899.

<sup>19</sup> Dissertation can be found on JSTOR or in the University of Pennsylvania's Van Pelt Library, more information can be found at the following link: [https://franklin.library.upenn.edu/catalog/FRANKLIN\\_9932338933503681](https://franklin.library.upenn.edu/catalog/FRANKLIN_9932338933503681)

<sup>20</sup> "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898-1989) Historical Marker."

<sup>21</sup> Robert A. Thomas, "Mrs. Alexander to Get Offer of Top Post on City's Anti-Bias Unit" *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 2, 1964, 1, 4.

<sup>22</sup> "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898-1989) Historical Marker."



In 1923, Sadie T.M. Alexander moved back to Philadelphia to pursue a law degree at her alma mater, and to marry her college sweetheart, Raymond Pace Alexander. Raymond Alexander had just graduated from Harvard Law School and moved back to Philadelphia. He passed the Pennsylvania bar exam, and married Sadie Mossell.

As Sadie T.M. Alexander finished her degree, her work was published for the American Academy of Political and Social Science.<sup>23</sup> The law practice opened by Raymond Pace Alexander would welcome his wife in 1927 as a recent graduate of law and the first Black woman to be accepted to the Pennsylvania Bar. They are thought to be one of the earliest husband-wife legal teams in the United States.<sup>24</sup>

Sadie T.M. Alexander's accomplishments would continue to grow as the years went by. In 1928, she was appointed Assistant City Solicitor of Philadelphia.<sup>25</sup> In 1936, she was appointed to the Texas Centennial Commission by the Secretary of Commerce, and from 1946-48, she served on Harry Truman's Committee on Civil Rights which produced one of the most important documents of the later Civil Rights Movement entitled *To Secure These Rights*.<sup>26</sup> In 1952, she was placed on the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, an agency that pursued social justice and advocated for civil rights in Philadelphia.

While holding these positions, she remained in practice with her husband until he was named to the Court of Common Pleas in 1959, the same year they purchased their home at 700 Westview Avenue.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 15: Sadie T.M. Alexander signing a petition for equal job opportunities in department stores. Source: <https://www.sadiecollective.org/stma>

In 1962, she became chair of Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations.<sup>28</sup> The following year she was once again called on by the president, this time to become a member of John F. Kennedy's Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Thomas, "Mrs. Alexander to Get Offer of Top Post on City's Anti-Bias Unit," 1, 4.

<sup>24</sup> "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898-1989) Historical Marker."

<sup>25</sup> "The Tanner Family." *Negro History Bulletin* 10, no. 7 (1947): 147-67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44174705>, 150.

<sup>26</sup> Martha Jablow, "An Activist, at 82, Takes up the Cause of 'Older People'." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 28, 1980, 29.

<sup>27</sup> "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Papers," Penn Libraries, University Archives and Records Center, <https://archives.upenn.edu/collections/finding-aid/upt50a374s/>.

<sup>28</sup> Mack, 267

<sup>29</sup> Jablow, "An Activist, at 82, Takes up the Cause of 'Older People'," 29.

**Profile**

## Life of Many Firsts


**M**R. SADIE T. M. ALEXANDER, unsalaried chairman of the Commission on Human Relations, has often been in the line of fire from some for doing too much for civil rights, from others for not doing enough.

Despite this she has pioneered a long and scholarly career filled with honors and rewards.

Born in Philadelphia, the daughter of Aron and Mary Tanner Mossell, she established a life that is marked with many important firsts. She was the first Negro woman to earn a law degree at the University of Pennsylvania, and the first to earn a Ph. D. in the United States and the first to practice law in Pennsylvania.

On Nov. 25, 1923, she married a young attorney, Raymond Pace Alexander, now Judge of Common Pleas Court 5. They have two daughters, Mary Elizabeth (Mrs. Melvin F. Brown) and Rae Pace.

Among her first awards was the Frances Sarjeant Pepper Fellow in economics, which she won in 1920. She was appointed a member of the Texas Centennial Com-



**MRS. SADIE ALEXANDER**

mission by the Secretary of Commerce in 1936. She is a member of the National Bar Association and the Federation Internacional de Abogadas, the bar of the Republic of Haiti.

She also is an author. Her book, "Standards of Living Among 100 Negro Migrant Families in Philadelphia" was published for the American Academy of Political and Social Science in 1923.

The Alexanders live at 700 Westview st.

Figure 17. Excerpt from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 2, 1964, p. 4.

## Personality



*Sadie Alexander has been an achiever all of her long life. Now, she says, "I don't have to go to work, but I don't know of anything else."*

Figure 16. Excerpt from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 28, 1980.

## Later Achievements

While the Alexander family resided at 700 Westview Avenue, they saw much of their hard work pay off. Raymond Pace Alexander had been fighting for the desegregation of schools for decades, including the highly public case of Girard College. He had represented the College's district on City Council and challenged their admissions policy which excluded Black students as per Stephen Girard's will. Raymond Alexander argued that the founder's will should be reinterpreted considering the contemporary social, political, and racial landscape. He insisted that because they were a private institution managed by a public agency, Girard College was required to adhere to federal statutes outlawing segregation.

Raymond Pace Alexander, who was a member of Philadelphia's liberal reform coalition, had successfully integrated several schools in Chester County in the 1930s. In March 1954, the same year as the landmark ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education*,<sup>30</sup> Raymond Pace Alexander and City Solicitor Abraham L. Freedman filed a lawsuit on behalf of six African American boys who were denied admission to Girard College. In 1957, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Girard College's ban on admitting Black students, ruling that it was in violation of the 14th Amendment.<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately, due to the nature of the financial agreement between Girard College and their funder, the Board of City Trusts, the school was able to reinterpret their relationship and appoint thirteen individuals as replacements for the Board, effectively becoming a fully private institution and evading the Supreme Court's ruling.

In 1965, Alexander's colleague Cecil B. Moore was re-elected as President of the local chapter of the NAACP. He sought to renew the effort to desegregate Girard College, among other desegregation efforts. Over ten years after their initial efforts in 1954, Raymond Pace Alexander and Cecil B. Moore, among others, successfully integrated Girard College. The school admitted their first Black students in 1968, an achievement the Alexanders perhaps celebrated from their Mount Airy home.<sup>32</sup>



*Figure 18. "Mrs. Sadie T. M. Alexander is presented with an award of honor by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Philadelphia County Council, for her services to the community. She is the first woman to be honored by the all male organization. From left, Mrs. Sadie T. M. Alexander, chairman, Commission on Human Relations; Judge Raymond Pace Alexander, Common Pleas Court; Dr. Matthew F. Gutowicz, commander of the Philadelphia County Council of the Veterans of Foreign Wars." September 11, 1963. Source: George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Collection, Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center.*

<sup>30</sup> For background information on *Brown Vs. Board of Education* and related cases, see: <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/history-brown-v-board-education-re-enactment>

<sup>31</sup> For more information on the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, see: <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-xiv>

<sup>32</sup> Hillary S. Kativa, "What: The Desegregation of Girard College." Omeka RSS. Temple University Libraries. Accessed March 15, 2022. <http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/exhibits/show/civil-rights-in-a-northern-city/collections/desegregation-of-girard-colleg/what-interpretative-essay>.



Raymond Pace Alexander passed away in 1974, leaving a very active Sadie T.M. Alexander to continue their work. She practiced law independently until 1975, at which time she joined the firm of Atkinson, Myers, and Archie as counsel. In 1978, she was honored nationally by President Jimmy Carter, who appointed her chair of the White House Conference on Aging. Sadie T.M. Alexander retired from law and public life in 1982 and remained at 700 Westview Avenue until 1985 at the age of 87 when she was declared incompetent.<sup>33</sup> Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander passed away in 1989, survived by two daughters.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

The Alexander family, especially Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander, exemplify a crucial moment in Black history. Sadie T.M. Alexander is an incredible example of Black female success in Philadelphia. She advocated for civil rights and equality, paving the way for young Black women and men alike. She and her husband Raymond Pace Alexander dedicated their lives to fighting for an ethical and free world and changed the fabric of Philadelphia through their work. The Alexanders are among the ranks of the greatest civil rights advocates in Philadelphia's history. As Sadie T.M. Alexander said herself, "I knew well that the only way I could get that door open was to knock it down; because I knocked all of them down. Don't let anything stop you."<sup>35</sup> The Alexanders' achievements and contributions to society merit great recognition within the scope of Philadelphia's history and beyond. The property at 700 Westview Avenue is a physical testament to their powerful legacy.

---

<sup>33</sup> 700 Westview Avenue deed, recorded March 7, 1985. DO Book 142 Page 571.

<sup>34</sup> "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Papers," Penn Libraries, University Archives and Records Center, <https://archives.upenn.edu/collections/finding-aid/upt50a374s/>; Jim Nicholson, "Sadie Alexander, Rights Pioneer," *Philadelphia Daily News*, November 3, 1989, 94-95.

<sup>35</sup> "Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander." The Sadie Collective. Accessed March 12, 2022. <https://www.sadiecollective.org/stma>.





Inquirer Photography by JAMES LINK JR.  
At their golden wedding anniversary party, Judge and Mrs. Raymond Pace Alexander (left) are pictured with their daughters, Mrs. Thomas K. Minter and Mrs. Melvin F. Brown (right).

Figure 19. Excerpts from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* showing the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party of Raymond and Sadie Alexander in their 700 Westview Avenue home in 1973. Ruth Seltzer, "Alexander's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party has 600 Guests." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Nov 26, 1973.



This is the way the living room of Judge and Mrs. Alexander's home in Germantown looked during the height of the party which celebrated their golden wedding anniversary.

Figure 20. Excerpts from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* showing the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party of Raymond and Sadie Alexander in their 700 Westview Avenue home in 1973. Ruth Seltzer, "Alexander's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party has 600 Guests." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Nov 26, 1973.

# Deaths

## Sadie Alexander, Rights Pioneer

By Jim Nicholson

*Daily News Staff Writer*

Sadie T.M. Alexander, an attorney and pioneer civil rights battler whose intellect, drive and humanity surmounted sex, race and other social barricades for more than six decades, died Wednesday. She was 91 and lived in Roxborough.

Wife of Judge Raymond Pace Alexander, who died in 1974, she was the first black woman to practice law in Pennsylvania and the first black woman to earn a doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania. She was also the first black woman to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania Law School.



Alexander

The fact that she was a black female in the first half of this century placed her in the history books. Colleagues held her in esteem, and younger generations held her in a kind of awe.

A modest woman whose gentle demeanor belied a steely resolve, she insisted that Dr. Constance Clayton, superintendent of Philadelphia Schools, attend the University of Pennsylvania for an advanced degree.

"She exemplified the woman of great accomplishments and really believed that it was possible for other people to make those same achievements," said Clayton, "She never spoke in terms of mediocrity. She really set very high expectations for

people with whom she associated and expected people to be contributors in the process. She thought there was nothing more important than a very good and superior education.

"She was a person who had achieved much and been in the company of presidents, but she never failed to remember how, as a young student herself, she had limited funds and, indeed, had to walk to school."

Chuck Stone, Daily News columnist and longtime friend of Alexander, said, "Sadie Alexander defined black womanhood. She's part of the historical cluster that includes women like Sojourner Truth, Mary McCleod Bethune, Rosa Parks — she's in their company. She set an intellectual and civil rights standard for the rest of us to follow. She will remain for many black people and other Americans, a genuine American hero."

Born in North Philadelphia, the former Sadie Tanner Mossell was reared in a family where excellence was not the goal but the standard. Her father, Aaron Mossell, was the first black graduate of Penn Law School. Her uncle was Henry O. Tanner, the artist. Her grandfather, Benjamin Tucker Tanner, wrote and spoke Hebrew and authored seven books.

She earned her undergraduate degree with honors from Penn in 1918 and her master's degree in economics in 1919. She received her doctorate in economics in 1921. Unable to find a job in Philadelphia, she went to North Carolina, where she worked for two years as an assistant actuary for an insurance company.

Returning to Philadelphia, she married Raymond Pace Alexander, whom she had met in college. They

See DEATHS Next Page



# DEATHS

Continued from Preceding Page  
married in 1923, after he passed the bar exam.

"I was home for a year, and I was miserable," she recalled in a 1980 interview with Inquirer reporter Martha Jablow. "Raymond asked me what I wanted to do, and I told him I thought I would like to go to law school if he could afford to send me. He said he could, and I thought I could work for him and he couldn't put me out on the street."

Over the years, she earned a reputation as a lawyer who came to court well prepared. Stone said: "I always admired this woman of tremendous intellectual power that was incandescent when she walked into a room. Lawyers used to get nervous when they had to go up against Sadie Alexander. She knew the law."

Throughout those early years, she and her husband initiated numerous legal fights against discrimination. She served as assistant city solicitor from 1928 to 1930 and again from 1934 to 1938.

In 1948 she served on President Harry S. Truman's Commission to Study the Civil Rights of All Americans of All Races and Faiths. She was picked by President John F. Kennedy in 1963 to serve on the lawyers committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Then, in 1980, President Jimmy Carter asked her to chair the White House Conference on Aging. "You can't say no to a president," she said at the time. Alexander continued to practice law into her mid-80s.

In 1986 the Philadelphia Bar Association named its public service center in honor of the Alexanders.

The recipient of numerous honors, she received honorary degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, Lincoln University, Swarthmore College, Drexel University, Medical College of Pennsylvania, and other institutions.

"Sadie was a great trailblazer," said Clayton, who had a virtual mother-daughter relationship with her. "She was in the vanguard of the fight for human rights at a time when it was not popular. I found that she never lost that zeal, the sharpness of wit, the extra edge she always seemed to have."

Said Sadie Alexander in an interview a few years ago, reflecting on her career, "... I haven't worked for the money — there's only so much you can eat, and you can only sleep in one bed — but I always wanted to do something where you can contribute something."

Survivors include two daughters, Rae Alexander-Minter and Mary A. Brown; a son-in-law, Thomas K. Minter; two grandchildren; a step-grandson and two great-grandchildren.

Memorial services are planned for a date to be announced.

## Bertha 'Bert' Braude

Bertha "Bert" Braude, active for many years in various Philadelphia charities, died Monday. She was 88 and lived in Center City.

She was active with the Federation of Jewish Agencies and in past years had been a solicitor, speaker and captain of the annual fund-raising

Figure 21. Obituary for Sadie T.M. Alexander. Source: Philadelphia Daily News, November 3, 1989, p. 94-95.

## Bibliography

- "Aaron Albert Mossell." Penn Libraries University Archives and Records Center. University of Pennsylvania, July 8, 2019. <https://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/aaron-albert-mossell>.
- Alexander, Raymond Pace. "Blacks and the Law." *Negro History Bulletin* 34, no. 5 (1971): 109–13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24766944>.
- "Alice (Welsh) Strawbridge." WikiTree, June 23, 2019. <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Welsh-975>.
- "Deed for parcel at corner of Westview Avenue & Sherman Street, ELT 529 222." City of Philadelphia. 1915. Pp. 222-224.
- "Deed for 700 Westview Avenue, CAB 1210." City of Philadelphia. 1959. P. 396.
- Dorman, Dana. "Philadelphia's African American Heritage: A Brief Historic Context Statement for the Preservation Alliance's Inventory of African American Historic Sites." Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. October 03, 2009.
- "Douglass Memorial Hospital, (Philadelphia) Is Founded." African American Registry, August 28, 2021. <https://aaregistry.org/story/douglass-memorial-hospital-founded/>.
- "Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander." The Sadie Collective. Accessed March 20, 2022. <https://www.sadiecollective.org/stma>.
- DuBois, W E.B. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, first published 1899.
- Garner, Carla. "Sadie T. M. Alexander (1898-1989)." Blackpast.org. Black Past, November 29, 2020. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/alexander-sadie-tanner-mossell-1898-1989/>.
- G.W. Bromley and Co., "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 1895." Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- Hotchkin, Samuel Fitch. "John Welsh" in *Ancient And Modern Germantown, Mount Airy and Chestnut Hill*, 1889, p. 330.
- Irons, Stasia. "Benjamin Tucker Tanner (1835-1923)." Black Past, February 28, 2020. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/tanner-benjamin-tucker-1835-1923/>.
- Kativa, Hillary S. "What: The Desegregation of Girard College." Omeka RSS. Temple University Libraries. Accessed March 15, 2022. <http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/exhibits/show/civil-rights-in-a-northern-cit/collections/desegregation-of-girard-colleg/what-interpretative-essay>.
- Mack, Kenneth W. "A Social History of Everyday Practice: Sadie T. M. Alexander and the Incorporation of Black Women into the American Legal Profession, 1925–1960." In *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision*, edited by Tamara L. Brown, Gregory S. Parks, and Clarenda M. Phillips, 2nd ed., 267–88. University Press of Kentucky, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcq14.15>.



- McAlester, Virginia. *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.
- Mikula, Jo. "The Desegregation of Girard College." Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Haverford College Philly Partners. Accessed March 27, 2022. <https://hsp.org/blogs/fondly-pennsylvania/desegregation-girard-college>.
- Mossell, Sadie Tanner. "The Standard of Living among One Hundred Negro Migrant Families in Philadelphia." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 98 (1921): 173–218. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1015062>.
- Nicholson, Jim. "Sadie Alexander, Rights Pioneer" *Philadelphia Daily News*, November 3, 1989.
- "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander (1898-1989) Historical Marker." Explorepahistory.com. Accessed March 20, 2022. <https://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-282>.
- "Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Papers." Penn Libraries University Archives and Records Center. University of Pennsylvania, Accessed March 2, 2022. Prepared by Thomas G. Potterfield, Maureen B. Spectre, and Theresa R. Snyder, assisted by Susan M. Jenkins. <https://archives.upenn.edu/collections/finding-aid/upt50a374s>.
- Seltzer, Ruth. "Alexander's 50th Anniversary Party Has 600 Guests." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 26, 1973.
- "The Latest News in Real Estate." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 22, 1903.
- "THE TANNER FAMILY." *Negro History Bulletin* 10, no. 7 (1947): 147–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44174705>.
- "The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution." National Constitution Center – The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Accessed April 10, 2022. <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-xiv>.
- Thomas, Robert A. "Mrs. Alexander to Get Offer of Top Post on City's Anti-Bias Unit." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 2, 1964.
- White, Alexander Strawbridge. "Alice Welsh Strawbridge." Strawbridge Family History, July 1, 2017. <https://strawbridgefamily.net/photographs/alice-welsh-strawbridge/>.
- Zylstra, Geoff D. "Whiteness, Freedom, and Technology: The Racial Struggle over Philadelphia's Streetcars, 1859—1867." *Technology and Culture* 52, no. 4 (2011): 678–702. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23020522>.