

Drs. Vada and John Somerville

“Hidden Heroes” Coloring Page



Drs. Vada Watson (1885–1972) and John Alexander Somerville (c.1882–1973) were a married couple who became dentists, leading civil rights activists, and accomplished entrepreneurs in early 20th century Los Angeles. John Somerville, a Jamaican immigrant, became the first black graduate from USC’s School of Dentistry. His wife, Vada Watson became the USC School of Dentistry’s second black graduate and the first African American woman to gain her license to practice dentistry in California.

The Somervilles co-founded the first Los Angeles chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and became entrepreneurs when they built the Hotel Somerville, an upscale hotel catering to African Americans who were excluded from the many whites-only establishments in Los Angeles. That hotel, depicted here, was later renamed the Dunbar Hotel and was the focal point of the famous blues and jazz scene that exploded on Central Avenue from the 1920s through the 1950s.