

## Hamilton Heights Historic District Extension

Historic District

140th-145th Streets between St. Nicholas and Amsterdam Avenues

Designation Date: March 28, 2000



*400, 402, 404, 406, 408, 410, 412, 414, 416, 418 West 145th Street. New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Hamilton Heights Historic District Extension Designation Report. Photo by Carl Forster.*

The Hamilton Heights Historic District Extension consists of 51 buildings, including 31 row houses, 17 apartment buildings, and three related (and contiguous) ecclesiastical structures. Located in northwestern Manhattan, from the north side of West 140th Street to the south side of West 145th Street, and from the east side of Amsterdam Avenue to the west side of St. Nicholas Avenue, the Extension expands the Historic District's present boundaries, designated in November 1974, to reflect Hamilton Heights's residential development more completely.

Over the past 400 years, Hamilton Heights has had a succession of names, all referring to its elevated geographic position. Under Dutch rule, the area was known as Jochem Pietersen's Hills, and later, under the British, Harlem Heights. During the siege of Manhattan in 1776, General George Washington retreated to Harlem Heights for several weeks, establishing his headquarters at the present location of West 161st Street and Edgecombe Avenue. Following several skirmishes with British troops, some of which occurred within the boundaries of the Historic District, the Continental Army evacuated to White Plains.

Alexander Hamilton, who served under General Washington during the battles of Harlem Heights and White Plains, acquired a 32-acre tract in Harlem Heights in August 1800. At the center of his property, near the present intersection of West 144th Street and Convent Avenue, he commissioned a 12-room Federal-style mansion (a designated New York City Landmark), as well as various out-buildings, from the prominent New York architect John McComb, Jr. Although Hamilton occupied the house for fewer than four years, the building (moved two blocks south in 1889) and neighborhood that surrounds it, remain closely associated with this American patriot.

Hamilton Heights retained its rural character until the mid 1880s, when a cable car railway began operating on Tenth (now Amsterdam) Avenue between West 125th and 155th Streets. During this period, William H. De Forest, a silk merchant, and real estate speculator, acquired much of the former Hamilton property. In 1886, he created a restrictive covenant limiting future construction to "brick or stone dwelling houses at least two stories in height." One exception was made, along Tenth (now Amsterdam) Avenue, where both apartment buildings and commercial storefronts were permitted beside the railway.

To spur development in accordance with his plan, De Forest's son, William De Forest Jr., commissioned the architect Harvey L. Page to design an apartment building and four adjoining townhouses in the Queen Anne style at the southwest corner of Tenth (now Amsterdam) Avenue and West 144th Street. This pattern was maintained throughout the district, with mostly three-story residences along the numbered streets, Convent Avenue, and Hamilton Terrace, and a continuous row of mainly six-story apartments on the east side of Amsterdam Avenue, extending from West 140th Street to 145th Street. In several instances, a unified urban ensemble was created in which the corner apartments and the adjacent townhouses were designed by the same architects, including designs by such residential specialists as Clarence True and Neville & Bagge.

Throughout the first decade of the 20th century, Hamilton Heights retained its character as a small-scale residential district. In 1906, the neighborhood's last group of single-family homes was built on the northside of West 141st Street, between Convent and Amsterdam Avenues. During the decade that followed, DeForest's restrictions expired and a group of apartment buildings, some as tall as ten stories, were erected along Convent Avenue and Hamilton Terrace, increasing the neighborhood's scale and density.

This second wave of urbanization is also recognized in the Hamilton Heights Historic District Extension, including such neo-Renaissance style apartment houses as Nos. 61 and 75 Hamilton Terrace, the Sadivian Arms, and 270 Convent Avenue. Architects active in the design of these and other later buildings in the extension include Neville & Bagge, Frank L. Norton, and Schwartz & Gross. With unbroken rows of handsome townhouses, contemporaneous apartment buildings, and religious structures, Hamilton Heights is one of the city's most architecturally distinctive enclaves.

[Read the full NYC LPC designation report here.](#)