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## Tasting the Sweetness in Hamilton Heights

By [JOSEPH DE AVILA](#)



Brian Harkin for

The Wall Street Journal

Hamilton Heights has limited space for new developments, adding to demand for its historic townhouses. Above, view up West 147th Street.

Upper Manhattan's Hamilton Heights derives its name from its most famous early inhabitant, Alexander Hamilton, who bought land in the area in 1799. At that time most of Upper Manhattan was still rural, and it wasn't till the 1880s that the neighborhood's stately townhomes began to be built for well-to-do white residents.

By 1919, the northern section of Hamilton Heights was beginning to be referred to as Sugar Hill, where "life is sweet." The area rose to fame during the 1930s when a wave of black professionals moved in. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, the novelist Ralph Ellison and jazz legends such as Charlie Parker all called the neighborhood home around this time.

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The area has several large parks.



The neighborhood, which lies in the western portion of Harlem just south of Washington Heights, hit rough patches in the decades following. During the 1980s, many residents fled as crime surged in surrounding parts of Harlem.

"Nobody wanted to live here," said Willie Kathryn Suggs, a broker who has lived in Hamilton Heights since 1985.

Crime in the area never reached the levels seen in other parts of Harlem, Ms. Suggs said, but it did make property cheap. She bought her office in the neighborhood at the time for about \$50,000, she said.

Now the townhomes of Hamilton Heights, many of which are in a landmarked historical district, are the properties that are in most demand, Ms. Suggs said.

Of the 84 residences currently listed for sale on real-estate site StreetEasy.com, the median asking price is \$537,000. The median price a square foot is \$458. In Central Harlem, it is \$571 a square foot, and in neighboring Washington Heights, it is \$427, according to StreetEasy.

On West 147th Street, there is a four-story townhouse built in 1901 that was renovated five years ago. The stoop was rebuilt, the antique doors and railings were restored and new windows were installed.

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City College of New York



The rust-colored townhome, with four bedrooms and three bathrooms, measures 3,200 square feet, is currently on the market for \$2 million.

On Convent Avenue there is a two-family townhouse on the market for \$1.21 million, listed by Ms. Suggs. It's one of a row of 10 limestone townhomes built around the turn of the century. It has five original fireplaces, original window and door moldings and a private garden. There are six bedrooms and five bathrooms in the four-story home.

Unlike other areas of Harlem, there wasn't much available land for new development in recent years. But a handful of new condo buildings have been constructed.

On West 136th Street, Gold Development built a six-floor, 29-unit condo building in 2006. That sold out in four months, said Romy Goldman, founder and president of Gold Development.

On Edgecombe Avenue, Gold Development built a 12-unit, six-floor condo building in 2009 called Hamilton Lofts.

Each unit has its own floor with elevators that open up directly in each condo. There is one unit left there listed at \$624,000.

One of the neighborhood's drawbacks is a lack of retail outlets. There are several banks and pharmacies in the area, but for many other types of retail needs, residents have to travel down to 125th Street. Sit-down restaurants are also far and few between.

**Schools:** Hamilton Heights' public schools are in District 6. They include A. Philip Randolph Campus High School, Hamilton Heights School and New Heights Academy Charter School.

Other schools in the district include P.S. 325 and Twenty-First Century Academy for Community Leadership.

In 2010, 43% of District 6 students in grades three through eight received a proficient score on the math exam, and 29.4% of students received a proficient score on the English Language Arts exam. In 2006, the results were 44.8% for math and 37.8% for reading.

Private schools in the neighborhood include Our Lady of Lourdes School, which runs from nursery school through eight grade, and Dorothy Day Early Childhood Center.

**Parks:** St. Nicholas Park, measuring about 23 acres, is one of three large parks in Hamilton Heights or adjacent to it. A portion of the St. Nicholas Park was the site of where George Washington fought during the battle of Harlem Heights in 1776.

The park was later designed by landscape architect Samuel Parsons Jr. and was constructed in 1906. Now it has areas for barbecuing, basketball and handball courts, playgrounds and dog runs.

On the banks of the Hudson River is Riverbank State Park, which has indoor and outdoor facilities spread over 28 acres. It has an ice rink, gymnasium, tennis courts and an Olympic-size pool. There are also basketball courts, a softball field and a football and soccer field.

Nearby is Jackie Robinson Park, which was originally called Colonial Park and was renamed for the Brooklyn Dodger legend in 1978. The park, which measures about 13 acres, has baseball fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, and pools.

**Entertainment:** Hamilton Heights is home to Harlem Stage at City College. The arts organization features music, dance theater and cinema.

Also in Hamilton Heights is the Dance Theater of Harlem, which offers training and also hosts performances.

**Shopping:** Just outside the neighborhood on Frederick Douglass Boulevard is Hue-Man Bookstore and Café, which hosts several readings.

Also on Frederick Douglass Boulevard is the bike shop MODSquad Cycles.

To the south of Hamilton Heights on 125th Street is Harlem's main shopping strip with shops such as H&M, Marshalls and others.

**Dining:** Just south of Hamilton Heights is Pisticci, which serves Italian cuisine. Marcus Samuelsson of "Top Chef" fame recently opened the comfort-food restaurant Red Rooster on nearby Lenox Avenue.

And for chicken and waffles and other soul-food dishes, there is Amy Ruth's on 116th Street.

**Write to** Joseph De Avila at [joseph.deavila@wsj.com](mailto:joseph.deavila@wsj.com)