

WHAT'S A MOSHOLU?

A winding stretch in the Bronx has a name with Native American origins



PHOTO: LENORE SCHULTZ

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The stream running through the northwest Bronx has given its name to an avenue, a parkway and an entire area, but most New Yorkers don't know that its name, Mosholu, is an Indian word meaning "smooth stones." Bronx residents who know the history of Mosholu's name are proud that it has a connection to the borough's Native American past.

Others, such as James White, a 52-year-old computer operator and 20-year-resident of the Bronx, have always wanted to look into New York's history and think that the Bronx is a good place to start. White believes that the name "Mosholu" honors the multicultural and ethnic diversity of the Bronx, and thinks that it's a shame that more street names don't reflect the borough's Native American past. "Maybe the Indians blessed us with the name Mosholu; that's probably why we get along so well," White adds.

What's a Mosholu? "It sounds like you sneezed, you know . . . aachoo," jokes Maria Minier, a 29-year-old mother and part-time receptionist who has lived on Boston Post Road for six years. Minier seemed interested in the origins of such a peculiar name

and appeared pleased with the fact that she lives on a historic street. Minier, moved to Post Road from upper Manhattan to escape the hustle and bustle of the city, or as she calls it, "street noise."

"Now when I walk around the neighborhood I will look at the street signs and ask myself what the origin of these names is"

Mosholu isn't the only street of Native American origin. Kappock Ave. in Spuyten Duyvil is derived from the Indian word Shorakapkok, or "sitting down place," and Minneford Avenue, a corrupted form of "Minnewits," is the Indian name for City Island. These names reflect alterations brought about by later settlers in the area.

According to the Bronx County Historical Society, during the 19th Century, on what is known today as Post Road and 246th Streets, a man named Mathias Warner opened a general store. The locale became a rest stop for stagecoaches traveling to and from Albany. Warner's store provided travelers with food and their horses with hay. Other merchants joined Warner, offering services such as a blacksmith shop, a granary to store locally grown grains, and even an animal pound where owners could reclaim cows, pigs and goats that had gone strayed. Local residents living in the area along Albany Post Road called the settlement "Warners," or "Warnerville," after the man who started it all.

By the middle of the century, when about 300 families resided there and a post office opened in the Warner store, the area's name was South Yonkers because it primarily served the more densely populated southern part of Yonkers. In 1860, however, the federal government designated the area as

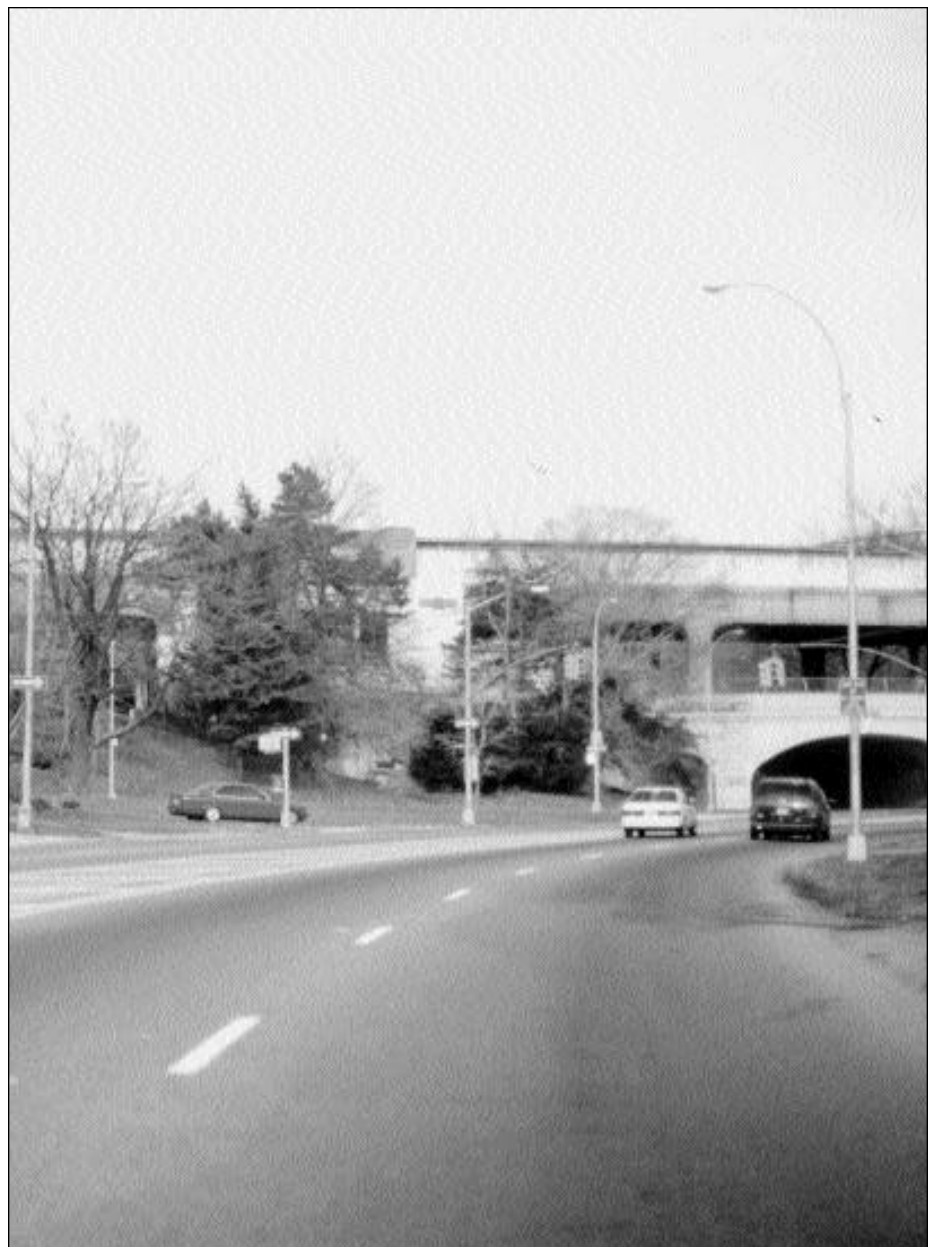


PHOTO: LENORE SCHULTZ

Mosholu.

The Yonkers Rapid Transit Railway, which led riders from Mosholu to Woodlawn, flagged Mosholu as a stop on its railway in 1879. That roadway later became Mosholu Avenue and in 1888, the

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station was included in the new Van Cortlandt Park. The parkway connecting Van Cortlandt and the Bronx parks was called Mosholu Parkway because it led westward to Mosholu.

Today, Mosholu Parkway is one of the major roadways in the Bronx. It begins at

the end of Allerton Avenue, turns north at Bronx Park East and continues as a tree-lined boulevard until it becomes a limited-access parkway, with interchanges at the Major Deegan Expressway (I-87) and the Henry Hudson-Saw Mill River Parkway.

If you are looking to get to Mosholu Avenue, however, don't expect much direction from local city bus drivers. Even when shown a map of the area, one Number 7 bus driver claimed that the map must be outdated. Mosholu Avenue is a winding street that runs uphill from Broadway, south of West 259th Street, and is hidden coming off the Henry Hudson Parkway one block south of Riverdale Avenue. Mosholu Avenue is a residential street, with a mix of private homes and residential buildings. Most Bronxites don't even know Mosholu Avenue exists; its residents, however, consider it a treasured secret. "I'd like to keep it a secret; it's a safe and peaceful haven," says Lora Lesser, a 37-year-old housewife and a four-year-resident of Mosholu Avenue.

If you are interested in researching the Bronx and its history, the following websites will be helpful: www.bronx.com, www.bronxhistorical.org, www.nypl.org, or visit the many local libraries located in the Bronx.