

[Yeshiva Me'on Hatorah Forced Out of Roosevelt](#)

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When Yeshiva Me'on Hatorah opened in Roosevelt, NJ, in *Elul* of 2005, its founders could never have foreseen the tumult that would ensue over the following five-plus years, as residents of the small Garden State town would battle the very existence of the *yeshiva* again and again.

The *yeshiva* opened its doors in the historic Congregation Anshei Roosevelt synagogue of the old Jewish settlement town, located some 20 miles northwest of Lakewood, NJ.

Ironically and perhaps tragically, the borough of Roosevelt, a 1.93-square-mile municipality whose town meetings and official business were once conducted in Yiddish and whose only house of worship is Congregation Anshei Roosevelt on Homestead Lane, has within it those who unfortunately did not appreciate the benefits of a *yeshiva* coming to their town.

The ensuing opposition ultimately resulted in an unprecedented recall election back in February 2006, removing the town's devoted mayor, the honorable Neil Marko. A *yeshiva* in town, the residents said, would mean the end of Roosevelt as they knew it.

For Mr. Marko and the *shul* leadership, headed by Elly and Arthur Shapiro, the *yeshiva's* coming to town actually marked sort of a beginning for Roosevelt. Dr. and Mrs. Shapiro and Mr. Marko demonstrated tremendous personal self-sacrifice on behalf of the *yeshiva*.

In the realm of the *Olam Hatorah*, the *yeshiva*, under the leadership of its *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Yisroel Meir Eisenberg, quickly earned a reputation as a premier *makom Torah*. Rav Eisenberg, a son of Rav Ephraim Eisenberg *zt"l*, noted *marbitz Torah* at Yeshiva Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, has led the *yeshiva* with great devotion, producing outstanding *bochurim* for the past half decade.

But it hasn't been easy, The *yeshiva* and the *shul* in Roosevelt were the subjects of relentless campaigns of harassment by the Borough of Roosevelt and some of its approximately 900 residents. At one point, a decision by the local Zoning and Planning Board stated that the operation of the *yeshiva* on the premises of the *shul* is not in compliance with the Borough's zoning ordinances. The *yeshiva's* attorneys constantly battled on its behalf.

The *yeshiva* was witness to a vigil and demonstrations, including signs and epitaphs of anti-Semitism. Back in 2006, the side of a private dwelling where some of the *talmidim* of the *yeshiva* resided was sprayed by about 70 yellow paint-ball pellets.

In addition to creating zoning changes and placing other legal roadblocks, the opponents of the *yeshiva* often used disparaging language in describing the lifestyle of Orthodox Jews, continually arguing that the *yeshiva* would take properties off the tax rolls, and claiming that the *yeshiva* faculty and their families would harm the local public school. Not a single building was taken off the tax rolls and the *yeshiva* had no bearing on the public school in the community. Nor did the *yeshiva* expect the Borough to provide it with any services that other residents do not receive.

Roosevelt was founded as a Great Depression-era utopian cooperative for Jewish garment workers. It looks pretty much as it did when it was started by the United States Department of the Interior in the late 1930s. Its streets meander around hills and stream beds, and most of its houses back up to green belts or woods, including the sprawling, 5,600-acre state-owned Assunpink Wildlife Management Area to the south.

The town is listed on both the National and State Registers of Historic Places. Roosevelt was originally named Jersey Homesteads. It was one of 34 municipalities started by the federal Subsistence Homesteads Program, an experiment that gave workers cooperative ownership over local farms and factories. In 1945, after President Roosevelt's death and long after the government had sold off the factory and farms, the borough renamed itself Roosevelt to honor F.D.R.

Congregation Anshei Roosevelt, founded in 1936 and at its current location since 1955, was at one time a thriving Orthodox *shul* that in recent years had struggled to function as a vibrant institution. Many attempts were made over the years to develop programming, including a nursery school, but the *shul* failed to have a regular *minyan*. The *shul* had reached the stage where it could no longer afford to retain the services of a rabbi. Under its arrangement with Yeshiva Meon Hatorah, the *rabbeim* on the faculty of the *yeshiva* led the *tefillos* at the *shul*.

However, the powerful opposition came to ahead this year, and just recently, Yeshiva Meon Hatorah was forced to say goodbye to its home since its inception.

“Some of the actions by the Borough officials and residents were manifestations of bigotry and hatred which has no place in the America of this generation,” a friend of the *yeshiva* told *Matzav.com*. “It is regrettable what occurred, but ultimately, to be honest, to ones who are losing the most are the residents of the town. It is their loss that this wonderful *yeshiva* has been forced out.”

The *yeshiva* has relocated to Monsey, NY, where it will continue to impart *ahavas haTorah* to its *talmidim*, producing well-rounded *beni Torah* who are *yereim ushelimim*.

{Yossi Schneider-Matzav.com Newscenter}