

The Social Relief Society Welcomes You To Cottekill... by Vivan Yess Wadlin

The Inviting Postcard

The bucolic image right is a postcard. Its postal cancellation reads: “Cottekill, N.Y. August 6, 1941, AM.” The Social Relief Society (SRS) advertising text on reverse sets the mood: “The S.R.S. Home is beautifully situated in the Catskill Mountains 900 feet above sea level in Cottekill, Ulster County, N.Y. Reasonable rates. All modern conveniences. Products from our own farm.”

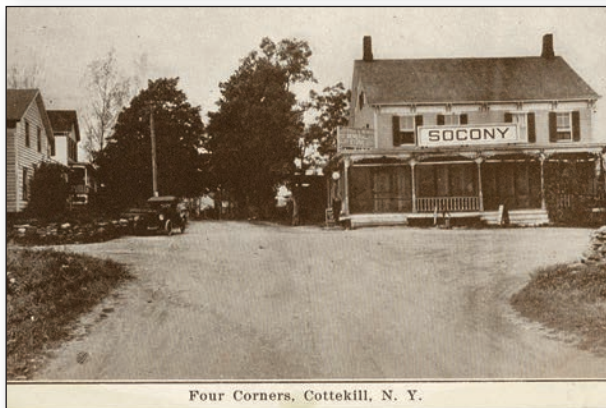
The card was sent to East Orange, NJ, with this message: “Dear Grace, I’m having a swell time up here. The water is fine. Miss you very much and wish you were here. Love to everyone at home, Ruth.”

Linen-textured postcards like this were printed from the 1930s to about 1945. This card was printed in Pearl River, NJ.

Prior to WWI (1914-1918), American postcards were often printed in Germany because of that nation’s superior printing capabilities, but with hostilities, most postcard printing returned to the US. Some of the earlier German-printed American postcards had a swastika printed on the address side. This confuses novice postcard collectors, causing them to wonder if the American site pictured on the card was a hotbed of little Hitlers. The answer is “no.” It had to do with the location of the card’s printing company at a time when that symbol had not yet become verboten.

The Hamlet of Cottekill

At the intersection of Lucas Avenue and Cottekill Road is, not surprisingly, Cottekill—the hamlet. A hamlet is simply a named place without its own governing body (sort of like heaven-on-earth). A hamlet is usually under the jurisdiction of a larger entity, such



as a Town or County (so much for heaven). For Cottekill, the governing body is the Town of Rosendale.

Ulster County has 68 named hamlets from A (Accord) to Z (Zena). In addition, there are hundreds of crossroads with a school or church that are named and known locally as well—think Plutarch, Lewisburg, or Ardonia.

The Cottekill hamlet is 2.4 square miles, has its own zip code (12429), is home to SUNY Ulster (community college), and a section of the Marlbetown-Rosendale Rail Trail. The center image below is the Cottekill Station which fed tourists into the area. According to its online bio, Cottekill has 451 residents. Noted among those residents, it was home to a detective novelist (Steve Hamilton) and a sculptor (Marja Villila).

Of interest here is another Cottekill institution: The Social Relief Society, aka the SRS Home, SRS Apartments, and now according to the sign out front, The Cottekill Apartments.

I can’t say why exactly, but I growing up I always thought the SRS had German roots—perhaps because of the Prussian penchant for “taking care of the folks.”

However, in researching the “Society,” which took some sleuthing, I did narrow in on what the SRS home actually did and how that changed over time. I did not come across any card with a swastika, but one postcard message was written in German and roughly translated to, “I let you know that I’ll get to you December 14th, and just stay the night. Your brother loves you warmly.” Postmarked Babylon, NY on November 27, 1963. The card was destined for South Plainfield, NJ.

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formative. In German, its advertising text reads “Ansichten vom Sozialistischen Altenheim und der Alternheim Farm in Cottekill, N.Y.,” which translates to “Views of the Socialist Home for the Elderly and the Home for the Elderly Farm In Cottekill, N.Y.” In the beginning it was assuredly for the “old folks at home.”

Its German care-taking roots



Ansichten vom Sozialistischen Altenheim und der Alternheim-Farm in Cottekill, Ulster County, N. Y.

SRS newspaper and postcard advertising. The cards’ handwritten messages thereon, and the fact that over the years from the early 1950s into the early 1970s, the SRS site regularly applied for and was granted liquor licenses. That the SRS was serving adult libations is borne out by the postcard on page 9 depicting the establishment’s bar.

The SRS had also developed into a venue for area organization’s social outings and meetings of every description. Topics cited in newspaper announcements about those gatherings included civic, political, and educational focuses. Entertainment was also presented, either as part of one of those programs or as a draw for the SRS resort’s clientele.

The number and variety of vintage postcard images for Cottekill and the SRS, as well as the ultimate destinations of the cards indicate the wide geographic audience the boarding resort commanded (MA, NJ, OH, IL, and Germany are a few from my small collection of Cottekill cards).

Many large boxed ads appeared regularly in the *Kingston Daily Freeman* and other local newspapers during the fifties

S. R. S. Home and Resort
 COTTEKILL, NEW YORK
 Phone: High Falls, N. Y., 2751

Welcome to Our Annual
SCHLACHTFEST
 on
SUNDAY, DEC. 5, 1954
 at the Social Relief Society Hall
 in Cottekill
 Time: 1 p. m. to 6 p. m.
 Dinner \$.250 each

Please make reservations as soon as possible
HEINZ SCHRIEVER, Manager



Colonial Boarding House of the Soc. R. Society, Cottekill, N. Y.



Boarder House of the S. R. Society

seemed intact in the earliest newspaper article I found (*Kingston Freeman* 1936, page 1). Sadly, it was about a suicide. The subheadline contained this: “Aged Inmate Had Given Hints of Despondency to Superintendent...” It noted the deceased was an “...aged German,” and that a “—Brother in Germany May Survive.”

After that it was hard to pin down exactly what kind of relief was offered by the SRS, and when it changed from its initial calling. But change it did.

At some point, the SRS morphed into a resort inviting visitors to partake of the country life, the night life, and the farm-fresh food. We know this because of the

Everybody is Welcome to Our FAMILY STYLE

Sauerbraten Dinner
 — at the —
SOCIAL RELIEF SOCIETY HOME
 IN COTTEKILL
SATURDAY, MAY 19
 Time 7:30 P. M. DINNER \$2.00

Bill of Fare:

Celery	Tomato Juice Cocktail	Olives
Potato Dumplings	Cream of Celery Soup	SAUERBRATEN
Coffee	Homemade Danish Pastry	Red Cabbage
	Tea	Milk

MUSIC AND DANCING
 Make Your Reservation Early
 Phone High Falls 2751 Heinz Schriever, Mgr.

and sixties, inviting the public to elaborate dinners and pig roasts sponsored by the SRS itself. Most ads noted authentic German cuisine. Again, I could not pinpoint when it entered its next phase, but I can't find any liquor licenses applied for from the mid-1970s on.

This brings us to the site's current use—an apartment complex. Not all the buildings currently in use are from the original SRS home or the resort. One



* Luckily, the Cottkill Fire Company had been established in 1932. Today, its volunteers are still fighting fires and you could, too. Volunteers are needed by most Ulster County departments. *Let them bring out the quiet hero in you.*



two-story building, known as the Colonial House (top of double image above), was destroyed by fire in November of 1970. More than 100 firefighters* battled that blaze.

Prior to the fire, there had been "...reservations for 38 guests from New York City, New Jersey, and other areas for the weekend," reported the *Kingston Daily Freeman* in their news of the event. When it morphed into an apartment complex remains a mystery to me.

For now, that is where we leave Cottkill and the SRS site. Thanks for visiting. Come back soon...

While we are on fire departments in that part of the County, visit the **Bloomington Fire Department Food Truck Fiestas**: Tuesdays, —June 20, July 18, August 15, September 19. Raindate is following week. Food Trucks, Live Music, Beer & Wine Available. Join us: 5:00 to 9:00 pm at 14 Taylor Street, Bloomington, 845-234-0002.



Future issues of About Town will feature postcard images of other hamlets in Ulster County. The fact that there are postcards indicates there was more going on in those little collections of humanity— things that may not be obvious today. Mostly, those things were taking place in commercial establishments, post offices, and churches. Since travel to larger villages was difficult, "staying put" was the hallmark of these many hamlet configurations.