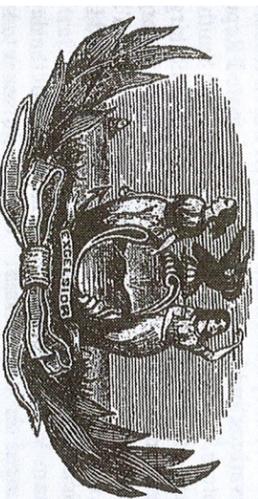


Putnam County News and Recorder



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"Spring - an experience
in immortality."
-Henry D. Thoreau

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CUNNINGHAM'S CORNER Dangerous Thinking on Vaccines

I'll just say it: This measles
thing has made me a little
cranky.

by
**DOUGLAS
CUNNINGHAM**

In 1998, a paper written by Andrew Wakefield and others was published in *The Lancet*, the British medical journal, that claimed the MMR vaccine (measles, mumps and rubella) was linked to the development of autism. It was not until 2004 that the paper was debunked, by a journalist for *The Sunday Times* of London, who reported that lawyers had paid Wakefield to write the paper to gin up lawsuits against the pharmaceutical companies. It would take until 2010,

after still more revelations of conflicts, shady deals and misconduct, before *The Lancet* fully retracted the paper. I think a benefit, albeit belated, of the veracity of "real news," as opposed to the inherent biases we confirm for ourselves every time we log onto Facebook.

Anyway, in rare cases, measles can be deadly. So it was especially unfortunate that Wakefield encouraged people to think the vaccine might be dangerous, that it might cause one's child to end up on the autism spectrum. Inexorably, this paper led to a decline in immunization. Thus exposing all of us to more danger, perhaps even a deadly case of measles. And, also, decreasing what is called "herd immunity." In other words, one reason some people seem to have the luxury of not being vaccinated is that so many people in the rest of population are vaccinated. It's a fascinating bit of his-



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER RADKO
A scene from "Hello, Dolly!" at Garrison's Landings.

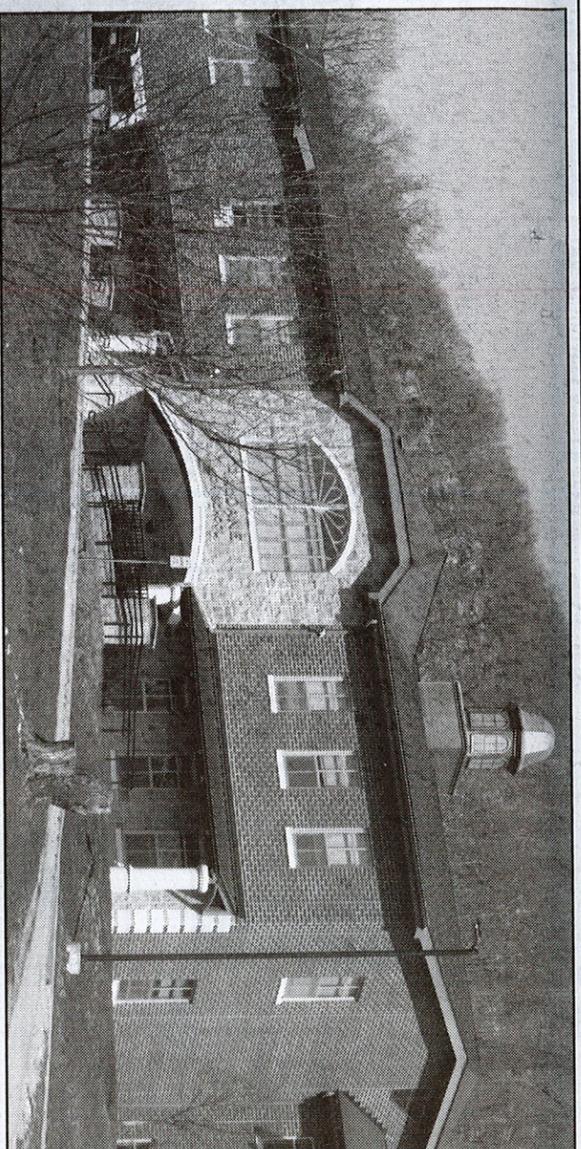
tory, on its own – but especially so, right now, in Putnam County. You see, we are in the midst of an outbreak of measles. It involves three counties, Putnam, Dutchess and Orange, multiple people, multiple sites of potential spread, and three confirmed cases. Two people in Putnam now have the disease, apparently contracted from two European tourists with measles who visited the area last month. A third person in Connecticut also contracted it, apparently from the original exposure. This area of exposure stretches from eastern Putnam into southwestern Dutchess – think the Red Line Diner in Fishkill, a veritable hop and skip up Route 9 – and then west into Orange County.

And here we are, with some people still, even now, thinking there is a link between autism and vaccines – even though the basis for thinking that has been completely discredited. And this is a case where hewing to this discredited belief, put simply, can be deadly.

Don't mess around. Don't toy with the lives of your children, or their playmates. Get your kids vaccinated. More information about measles, from the state Health Department, which is closely tracking the events in Putnam, is here: <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2170.pdf>. **

It was old movie week at our house last week. First, we watched *Hello Dolly!*, about matchmaker Dolly Levi, Yonkers and local merchant Horace Vandergelder – but of course, here, isn't it really about Garrison? What a cast! What voices! A host of events have been organized to highlight the 50th anniversary of the filming, a good part of which was in Garrison and Cold Spring, and of course, the final scene, at West Point overlooking the Hudson.

Douglas Cunningham is publisher of both the PCNR and its sister paper the *Courier*, in Carmel. Letters on this or other topics are welcome. Limit to 500 words. Send to editor@pcnr.com.



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