

"King All Glorious" was written by George M. Vail.

George Vail was and organist, choir director, and music publisher. Born 1892, Orient, Long Island, NY, he graduated from the Guilmant Organ School, and studied piano with Mrs. A.M Virgil, choir training with G. Edward Stubbs and Clement R. Gale. He served as organist at five churches, worked with the G. Schirmer music publisher, and later was Vice-President and Musical Editor, Harold Flammer, Inc., music publishers.

In the early 1940s and into the 1950s, he was organist at Christ and St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Norfolk, Virginia.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897)

SERIAL NUMBER U. 2967	1. NAME (Print) George Maxen Vail (First) (Middle) (Last)	ORDER NUMBER
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 111 W Plume Norfolk Norfolk Va (Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)		
3. MAILING ADDRESS P.O. Box 1821 (Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If none insert word none)		
4. TELEPHONE Norfolk Va 26938	5. AGE IN YEARS 50	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Orient L.I. N.Y.
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WOULD ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Ernest S. Vail Orient L.I., N.Y.		
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS Christ Church		
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Stockley Gardens Norfolk Norfolk Va (Number and street or R. F. D. address) (Town) (County) (State)		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.		
D. S. S. FORM 1 (Revised 4-1-42)		10-2500-2 George M. Vail (Signature - handwritten)

When George Maxon Vail was born on July 2, 1892, in Orient, New York, his father, Ernest, was 23 and his mother, Lulah, was 23. He had two brothers and four sisters. He died on August 24, 1974, in Greenport, New York, at the age of 82, and was buried in his hometown.

408 ERNEST GILSON, [George M.,⁸ Samuel G.,⁷ Samuel,⁶ Jeremiah⁵⁻¹],
b. at Orient, 14 July, 1868; m. Lulah Fraprie Holmes, 5 Nov.,
1888. She was b. at Orient, 26 Mch., 1869. He is a fisherman,
in company with his father and brother-in-law. Children:

- i GEORGE MAXON, b. 2 July, 1892.
- ii ANTOINETTE SEAMAN, b. 19 Sept., 1894.
- iii HELEN ABIGAIL, b. 6 Feb., 1897.
- iv DONALD LEROY, b. 13 Aug., 1899.

GEORGE M. VAIL

George M. Vail died at Eastern Long Island Hospital on August 24, 1974. Mr. Vail was born in Orient on July 2, 1892, a son of Ernest Gilson Vail and Lulah Holmes Vail.

After graduation from the Gilmont Organ School, New York City, he was a church organist, choir director, and composer of church anthems. For many years he was affiliated with Christ-St. Lukes Church in Norfolk, Va.

Funeral services were held at the United Methodist Church in Orient on Sunday, August 25. Rev. Donald Hamblin and Dr. Harry Dorman officiated. Interment was in Orient Central Cemetery.

Surviving Mr. Vail are a brother, Herbert G. Vail, and, two sisters, Mrs. Roy Latham and Mrs. Elbert Luce, all of Orient, as well as many nieces and nephews.

Form 1 ~~668~~ REGISTRATION CARD 61 No. 78

1 Name in full: George M Vail (Family name) Age in yrs: 24

2 Home address: 3rd So Oxford St. Bklyn NY (No.) (City) (State)

3 Date of birth: July 2 1892 (Month) (Day) (Year)

4 Are you: (1) a natural born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? Natural Born

5 Where were you born? Orient NY U.S. (Town) (State) (Nation)

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

7 What is your trade, occupation, or office? Missionary

8 By whom employed? Harold Flamm Inc. Where employed? 56 W. 45th St. NY C.

9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? None

10 Married or single (which)? single Race (specify which)? Caucasian

11 What military service have you had? Rank None; branch years 0; Nation or State U.S.

12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? No answer

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

George M. Vail (Signature or mark)

*Order # 127
If person is not listed on this card*

REGISTRAR'S REPORT 31-9-45-A

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which): Medium Slender, medium, or stout (which)? Slight

2 Color of eyes: Gray Color of hair: Light Bald? No

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? None

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

Precinct 156 James J. Johnson (Signature of registrar)

City or County NY State NY June 5/7 (Date of registration)



**George M. Vail
in his World
War I Army
uniform,
with siblings
Nettie and Herb**



Mr. Vail was also co-owner of the Vail-Leavitt Music Hall, Suffolk County, NY. It is on the National Register of Historic Places due to the fact that in 1914, the Music Hall was used by Thomas Edison as a demonstration site for kinetophone, an early attempt at the synchronization of sound and film.



The Vail-Leavitt Music Hall is a late nineteenth century theatre presently in use on the east end of Long island in Riverhead, New York. The Theatre/Music Hall was built by David F. Vail, with the help of his son **George M. Vail**, in 1881. David was a local lumber dealer in Riverhead and Eastern Suffolk County Long Island area.

The theatre/music hall opened on October 11, 1881, and has only occasionally served as a movie theater since its beginnings. With its almost 130-year history, the theatre/music hall could hardly be more distinguished as when Thomas Edison used the theater for early experiments in sound movies in 1914.

The music hall began its start with candle lighting, however, it is said The Music Hall had its own gas plant behind the theatre, gas fixtures were placed all along the horseshoe balcony, and gaslight continued at the music hall until the advent of electricity arrived in July 1888. The venue now had electric lights.

In 1908, George M. Vail, Sr., now sole owner of Music Hall, sold the building to Simon Leavitt, father of the late well-known men's clothier, Theodore Leavitt, whose widow, Mollie Leavitt, owned the music hall until its acquisition by the Council for the Vail-Leavitt Music Hall in 1982 through a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development arranged by the Town of Riverhead's Community Development officer, Robert Schemer.



Early History --- The Vail Years

Located on what today is known as Peconic Avenue (then called Bridge Street), the Music Hall was the talk of the town when David F. Vail, a venturesome local lumber dealer built it with the help of his son, **George M. Vail**.

The Long Island Traveler of April 22, 1881, noted: "Numerous improvements are being made throughout our village. The large brick building is rapidly nearing completion and when finished will be a marked improvement over the old rookeries which now front on Bridge Street..." A week or two later, the Traveler reported that "Mr. J. W. Flack will soon start embellishing and frescoing the interior." Mr. Flack was a well-known Eastern Long Island interior decorator of the period, and an expert in the application of gold leaf. Even today at Music Hall, we can see gold highlights at various places in the restored interior.

The Mozart Orchestra, under the direction of Professor Arthur M. Tyte, was a staple of early-day entertainment at Riverhead's Music Hall. Prof. Tyte's family still survives in the area. It has been said that some of the Tyte compositions, including the scores of several operas, are still in existence in the possession of descendants.

After a number of previews, including a strawberry festival and musicale, Music Hall opened with fanfare on October 11, 1881. The event was a concert with both professional and amateur talent, sponsored by the Rough & Ready Engine Company of Riverhead. A smashing success, the show continued until 3 A.M. It was then that the firefighters were called to duty-- to extinguish a blaze in a barn over on Osborne Avenue, owned by Mr. Osborne. Off they went, according to the Riverhead News, "grabbing such hats as they could get" from the coat hooks still to be seen on the walls of the theatre --- and "leaving the ladies to wend their way home as best they could."

Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was Music Hall's first professional play, and was produced at the Music Hall by several companies during its early years. One of the earliest performances included a wondrous curiosity billed in the programs as **"Edison's Electric Parlor Lamp."** Since electricity was still in the future as a common lighting source, we can only surmise that the lamp must have been battery-powered. This was Music Hall's first connection with the name of Thomas A. Edison.

In the ensuing years, Music Hall played host to a variety of events. A lecture by one Theodore Tilton entitled "The World of Tomorrow," so stirred the Music Hall audience that the editor of the Long Island Traveler called for the founding of a group to present more such offerings and to give the proceeds to the Riverhead Reading Room, located on the top floor of the yellow-brick Bank Building still standing on Main Street. This was the start of the Riverhead Lecture Society, which in turn brought about what we know today as the Riverhead Free Library.

UPDATED INFORMATION:

Of the three theatres which existed in Riverhead in the late nineteenth century, only one – the Music Hall – has come down to us. Miraculously escaping the wrecker's ball due largely to its upstairs location over two lucrative storefronts, the Music Hall has survived all its contemporaries to become the oldest theater on Long Island or New York City – 20 years older than Broadway's oldest theater.

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In April of 1885, Music Hall contributed to the construction of the pedestal of the “Bartholdi Statue,” according to a Traveler item. Mrs. Frank Baird, a local art teacher, engaged the hall for an “art reception” with the proceeds to be allotted to what we now know as the Statue of Liberty.

Lighting at Music Hall appears to have begun with candles. According to a press item, the candles in the footlights started a small blaze which was quickly extinguished. Whether these candles were a supplement to gaslight or whether the gaslight followed the bad experience with candles is not known. We do know, however, that the Music Hall had its own gas plant behind the theatre, that gas fixtures were placed all along the horseshoe balcony, and that gaslight continued at Music Hall until the advent of electricity there in July of 1888.

The Improved Order of Red Men, a fraternal organization founded by George Washington for the purpose of assisting Native Americans in their problems with incoming settlers, engaged Music Hall for a six-year period beginning in 1900.

In 1908, Thomas A. Edison’s famous name returned to the Music Hall for the first time since “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” It was then that Edison’s “moving picture show” made its Riverhead debut. While it was not the first movie shown in Riverhead, it featured a dramatization of the famous Harry K. Thaw murder case “depicting all phases from the shooting to the incarceration of Thaw in Matteawan.” Taking no chances, the management thoughtfully added “a number of first-class vaudeville acts.”

20th Century and The Leavitt Years

Later that year, George M. Vail (by now sole owner of Music Hall) sold the building to Simon Leavitt. Leavitt’s Men’s Shop served the community into the 1970’s as downtown Riverhead developed into one of Suffolk County’s premier commercial shopping districts. Some local residents recall it as a long-time local outlet for purchasing Boy Scout uniforms and supplies.

Beginning in 1909, the Music Hall became known as the Lyceum Theatre – the Broadway theatre of the same name had been built that year and probably inspired the change – and as such presented moving pictures, vaudeville, occasional stock and road companies, and more rarely, concerts and dances.

It was about this time that the late Ted Leavitt, then a youth, remembered having met a young Western rope-spinner then performing on the Lyceum stage named Will Rogers, who taught the youngster the art of lariat-twirling in between appearances in the theatre upstairs.

In 1912, after several successful years of vaudeville, film, lecture and concert bookings, the Leavitts leased their upstairs showplace to Franklin P. McCutcheon, a vastly experienced showman from Brooklyn. Under the McCutcheon management in 1914 came one of the Lyceum’s most exciting times.

For several years, Thomas Edison had been working on a new development in entertainment – talking motion pictures. At the same time, the talents of the great inventor were devoted to another experiment in nearby Quogue – extracting iron from the sands of that ocean resort. In 1914, an advertisement appeared in the Riverhead News to the effect that “The Eighth Wonder of the World” was coming to the Lyceum Theatre in Riverhead – “Thomas A. Edison’s Talking Pictures.”

The all talking program featured John J. McGraw, then manager of the New York Giants; Van and Schenck, popular musical comedy stars; a scene from "Faust"; Edison's Minstrels; "Julius Caesar" and an all-star feature program. "No silent pictures shown," declared the Lyceum ad.

In its next issue, the Riverhead News raved about Edison's experiment. "The talking movies at the Lyceum here last week was a show that greatly pleased large audiences," stated the enthusiastic reviewer. "Most of the people present declared it a marvelous performance. The accurate timing of the words, music, dancing and various sounds with the pictures produced results practically perfect, and there was hardly any flicker to the pictures themselves. It was hard to believe that live persons were not on the stage contributing to the program."

Thomas Edison's experimental system, properly known as "Kinetophone", was brought to the theater in an effort to raise capital and garner good publicity. It is known that Edison's own technicians were prohibited from running the equipment in the unionized theaters of New York and other cities, resulting in an embarrassing lack of synchronization between the picture and sound at those showings. As a result, Edison chose to bring Kinetophone to the Music Hall as well as other local theaters across the country.

Edison suffered a major setback when a fire broke out at his lab in West Orange, New Jersey in December of 1914. Many items relating to the kinetophone project were destroyed, although Edison did attempt to continue for a time. Ultimately, lack of investment, other projects, and his own advancing age caused the great inventor to abandon kinetophone. It would be more than a decade until "talkies" reached a mass audience, but the Music Hall remains as one of the only surviving original sites of Edison's experimental kinetophone exhibitions.

For three more years, the Lyceum continued its career as a purveyor of motion picture entertainment. However, announcement of a palatial new theatre to be called the Riverhead Capitol in late 1917 seemed to throw a pall over activities at the Lyceum. With the onset of World War I and as a flu pandemic struck, the Lyceum's screen and stage events came to a halt.

It is known that after the war, the old theatre was converted into the Imperial Restaurant, a lavish Chinese restaurant. However in 1925, that enterprise came to a sad end when a kitchen fire damaged an area that had been the stage, but was prevented from spreading elsewhere by a wall that had been erected between the stage and the auditorium. Thus were preserved the ornate box tiers and the notable horseshoe balcony as well as the elaborate stage proscenium arch.

A short career as a pool hall and another one as a betting parlor (ending in an eviction notice from the Leavitts) were the last public activities in Music Hall. A fire, unruly pool sharks and shady bookies were enough for the owner, who vowed from then on nothing would occupy the space over his store but storage...and that was the way it was from 1925 until 1978.

Around 1967, Ted Leavitt told local businessman Harold Smith about the theatre over his store upstairs. Mr. Smith – an actor dating back to 1929 – would soon become the leading force to restore the Music Hall.

Present-day Riverhead's first look at the 1881 Music Hall (the name of Lyceum had by then been abandoned) came at the time of one of the early Riverhead Country Fairs. As an early member of Riverhead Townscape, Smith succeeded in interesting the membership in establishing a sub-committee to revitalize the old Music Hall. A first meeting of the new group was held in November of 1978. The committee's activities broadened, and it was not long before Townscape decided that its offshoot should become an independent body, providing sufficient funds for its incorporation as such.

The new corporation, the Council for the Vail Leavitt Music Hall, accepted the building through a HUD block grant arranged by the Town of Riverhead's Community Development officer, Robert

Schemer. This was accomplished in April 1982. In that period, the Hall's Council raised over \$100,000 in cash and in-kind contributions to operate and restore Riverhead's historic hall. In September 1985, after several years of work on applications and interviews, Music Hall was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The first phase of Music Hall's restoration began with the opening of the Music Hall Mini-Cine in the former Leavitt's Men's Shop in 1984. Prior to the opening, Council members volunteered their services in rebuilding the former haberdashery into an 84-seat cinema. A generous contribution from a council member provided the funds for the purchase of theatre chairs from the old Freeport Theatre which was to be razed. A Laurel and Hardy Film Festival opened the Music Hall Mini-Cine in the spring of 1984. Revival films were very popular in the early '80s, and it seemed the public couldn't get enough of Bogart, Gable, Garbo, Monroe and perhaps most especially, the MacDonald/Eddy operettas.

Recent History

By the 1990's the advent of home video spelled the end of revival films in theatres, and the Council was finding it increasing difficult to maintain and operate the Mini-Cine profitably. As a result, upstairs restoration was put on hold.

Recognizing the importance of the Vail-Leavitt to revitalization of downtown Riverhead's arts district, the Town Board and supervisor Vinnie Vilella allocated \$150,000 of mitigation fees received from construction of the Tanger Outlets specifically to restoration efforts at the Music Hall. Unfortunately, disagreements within the Vail's board resulted in lack of a cohesive plan and direction for several years. Town government, growing impatient with the lack of progress, would not release allocated funds until a viable plan of action was presented to them.

In early 2002, after public hearings called attention to the cause, several new members joined the Council. Bob Barta (a local college professor, musicologist and performer) joined the board and was able to reopen discussions with supervisor Bob Kozakiewicz and the town board, garnering key support. Mr. Barta would quickly become vice-president, and since 2006 has been president of the Vail-Leavitt board. Another notable addition to the Music Hall was Vince Tria, the owner of local radio station WRIV. A former general contractor, Tria became the organization's treasurer and brought his experience in engineering and local politics to bear on the restoration project.

In just over a year, major renovation took place, including pouring of a foundation floor, fine carpentry restoration, construction of restrooms and a dressing room, carpeting and flooring...a complete overhaul of the Music Hall. Modern heating and air-conditioning were installed while maintaining the Music Hall's original interior decor.

The Mini-Cine was converted into a multi-purpose area suitable for meetings, limited presentations or intermission-style receptions. A new archway was built to permit direct access from the downstairs lobby to the grand staircase, as well as necessary office space.

The Music Hall's exterior received attention as well. Originally, the Hall's brick walls were unpainted, while its cast iron first-floor front sported a coat of gray-blue. Research and expert consultation advocated repainting the exterior rather than attempting paint removal which could damage the soft brick. A rear entry ramp, along with a lift-style elevator, made the Music Hall handicap-accessible for the first time in its long history.



After spectacular interior painting by local artisan Mary Cox and restoration of historical stenciling by Sherrie Netusil-Barta, the Vail-Leavitt Music Hall re-opened in the summer of 2003. Since then, it has hosted numerous performances by local and internationally recognized performers and serves as a symbol of Riverhead's cultural and artistic heritage.

Now

International artists of note who have graced our stage include:

- Leon Redbone
- Lee Konitz
- Bucky Pizzarelli
- Teddy Charles
- Sam Taylor
- Four O'Clock Flowers
- Pete Best
- Frank Vignola
- Jeff and Anne Barnhart
- Toby Walker
- Rosie Ledet
- Ari Eisinger
- Jerron Paxton
- Peter Tork
- Jim Kweskin
- Geoff Muldaur
- Chad and Jeremy
- Sarah Spencer
- Bob Greene

...along with an equally stellar list of regional talent too large to enumerate.

The Music Hall is proud to feature great local and original performers. From 2006 to 2012, the Vail-Leavitt produced the Riverhead Blues and Music Festival at the downtown's historic riverfront, drawing thousands of music fans to hear legendary performers like Little Charlie & The Nightcats, Mose Allison, Johnny Winter, Savoy Brown and many more. The Music Hall also serves the community as a site for public meetings and forums, including charitable fundraisers, debates of local candidates for office, educational presentations, and past inauguration ceremonies for Riverhead's elected officials.

The Council continues its fundraising efforts to further promote arts and cultural education in downtown Riverhead. We greatly appreciate the support and patronage of our community.



The Vail-Leavitt Music Hall is a beautiful old opera house founded in 1881. During WWI people lost interest in the performing arts and production of events ceased. The theater hosted a variety of different things including a men's clothing store, a Chinese restaurant, and a pool hall. Forgotten for a time the theater sat silent and fell into disrepair but has been restored lovingly to its full former glory. Located in Riverhead on the scenic Peconic River front the Vail operates as a non-for-profit organization working to support music and the performing arts on Long Island and in the Tri-State area. The Music Hall is available to rent for music performances, theatre productions, opera productions, wedding receptions and more.

*Original research by Harold Smith, Jean Hallock and Sylvia Shaffran (circa 1980)
Revised and updated by Robert Barta (2020)*