

Grieving a lost library

Author researches the downfall of her beloved hometown library

You can take the girl out of Yonkers but you can't take Yonkers out of the girl.

While author Patricia Vaccarino has lived most of her adult life in the Pacific Northwest, her hometown in New York is the inspiration for many of her stories.

Two of Vaccarino's previous books, "YONKERS, Yonkers" and "The Heart of Yonkers," were working class coming-of-age novels.

But her latest effort, "The Death of a Library: An American Tragedy," is something different. The book is a mash-up of historical monograph and scathing indictment. Vaccarino explores the calculated political cronyism that brought down what many regarded as the crown jewel of her hometown, Yonkers' Carnegie Library.

Built in an unusual octagonal shape, the Beaux-Arts style library was situated along one of Yonkers' main arterials, at the top of a hill right next to City Hall. The library conveyed an Acropolis-like air to the city that once had been a manufacturing hub, home to Otis Elevator and the Domino Sugar Refinery.

This week's book

'The Death of a Library' by Patricia Vaccarino

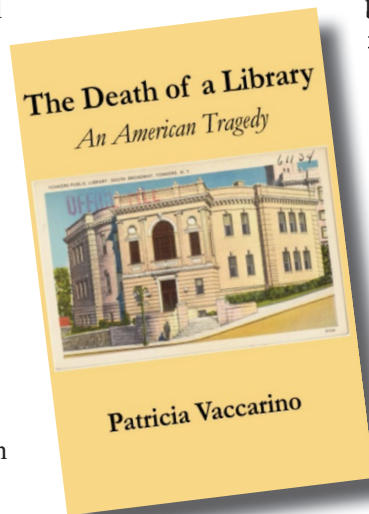
Modus Operandi Books — 184 pp — \$12.95

By the time Vaccarino was growing up in Yonkers, the city was in decline but the library remained "a sight to behold, a grand object of permanence and beauty, and a beacon of hope in a city that no longer reigned as a queen in manufacturing but was now being savagely torn up in the throes of urban blight and white flight."

She describes in detail the library interior — a place of high ceilings, ornately tiled floors, lunette murals in the children's section and a seemingly limitless supply of books — it seemed palatial to a working class

youngster.

I'd wager that many of us have similar strong attachments to the libraries of our youth. Often it was in the library that we first discovered our own agency: getting a library card, considering the librarian's book recommendations, then ultimately making decisions about which books to



Patricia Vaccarino's latest book focuses on the demise of her hometown library.

check out. Libraries, for many of us, are a foundational part of our existence.

It isn't hard to understand Vaccarino's devastation when, after moving away as a young adult, she returns to Yonkers to visit her grandmother and discovers that the Carnegie Library — that seemingly eternal edifice on the hill, that bastion of books and ideas — is gone. All that is left next to City Hall is a hole in the ground.

The library was demolished in a grandiose city renovation scheme but the promised developments never materialized.

That's not to say that nobody profited — but local residents didn't see the benefit.

In her research for this book, the author uncovers racism, redlining, government oversight and ineffectual citizen opposition. Vaccarino writes at a fever pitch, naming names and alluding to "Trumpian" tactics and possible mob associations.

If not always polished, "The Death of a Library" is a passionate requiem — and an accusation against a political system that ignored the public voice.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com

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