

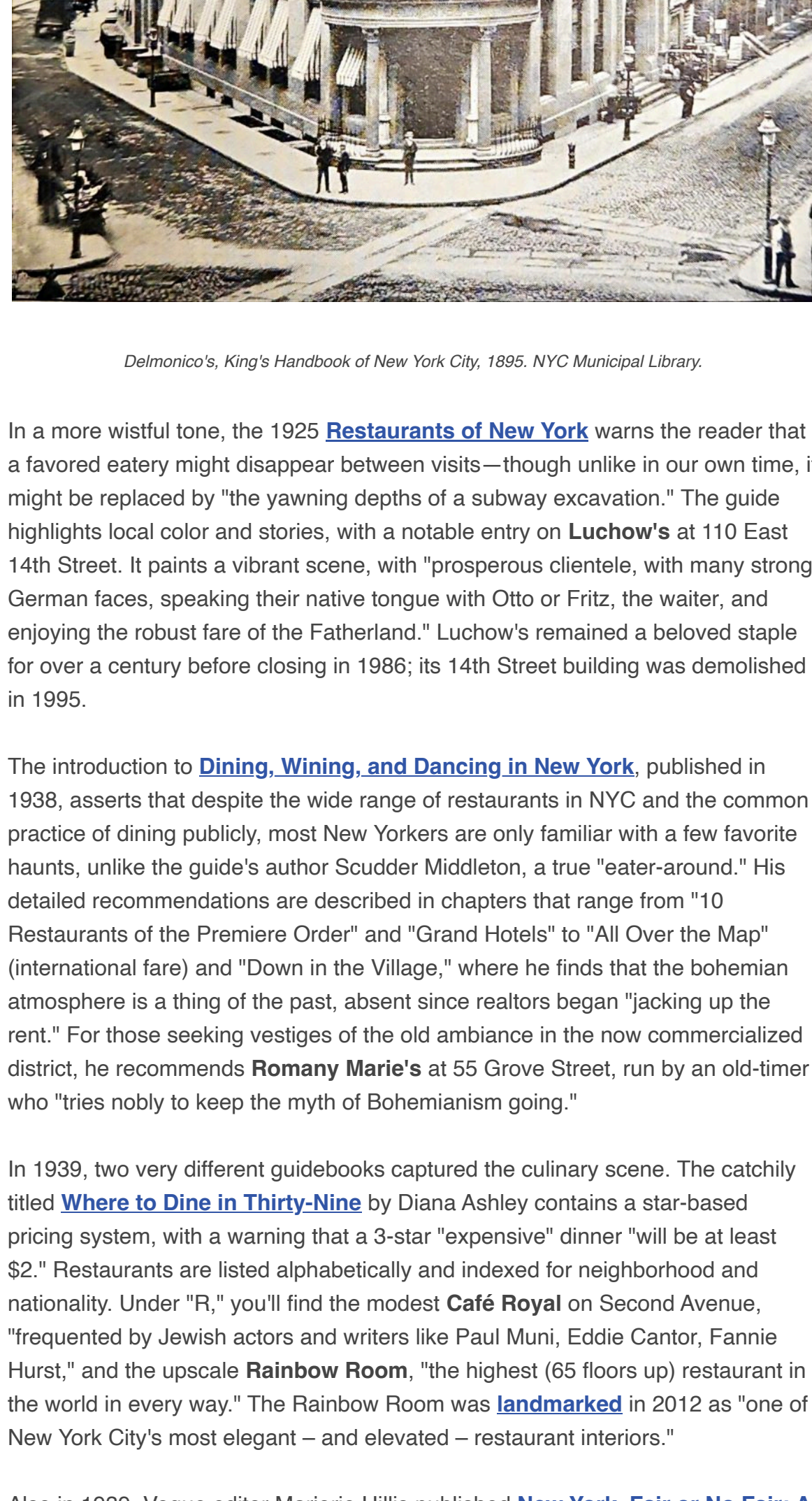
## Municipal Library Notes August 2025

### A Century and a Half of Dining Out in NYC

As NYC Restaurant Week winds down, we are taking a looking back at more than 150 years of dining out in the city through the lens of guidebooks and other historic publications in the collections of the Municipal Library.

In a chapter on restaurants, the 1868 [Secrets of the Great City](#) by Edward Winslow Martin cautions the reader that "the cooking, at the majority of restaurants, is unhealthy, and intoxicating liquids are sold, to an extraordinary extent." Because entire families "live in rooms" and are thus required to dine in restaurants, the establishments are characterized by "a looseness of manners" and a "similar defect in morals." Even worse, the uptown restaurants are largely patronized by the "disreputable classes," and a "virtuous woman is in constant danger of being insulted should she choose to enter one of them."

The heavily illustrated 1895 [King's Handbook of New York City](#) steers away from moralizing in its snapshot of the booming dining scene, which praises the "abundance of restaurants and cafes." It divides them into categories that include "cheap saloons," "dry-goods-stores restaurants," "table d'hote dinners," and a "novelty" section that lists Chinese, Jewish, Russian, and Italian establishments. The guide's top praise is reserved for [Delmonico's](#), "known all over the world," especially its Beaver and William Street location. A century later, the [NYC Landmarks Designation Report](#) for that 8-story Delmonico's building calls it "one of the finest surviving late-nineteenth-century buildings in Manhattan's financial district."



Delmonico's, King's Handbook of New York City, 1895. NYC Municipal Library.

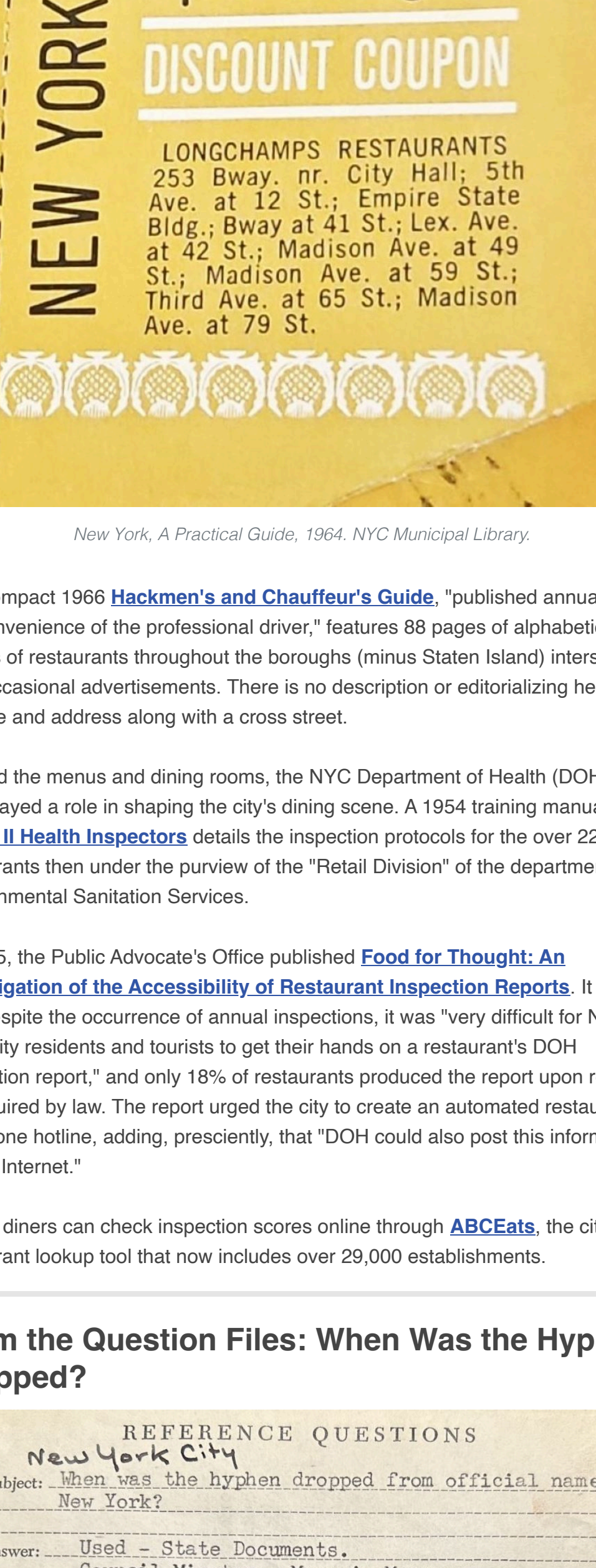
In a more wistful tone, the 1925 [Restaurants of New York](#) warns the reader that a favored eatery might disappear between visits—though unlike in our own time, it might be replaced by "the yawning depths of a subway excavation." The guide highlights local color and stories, with a notable entry on [Luchow's](#) at 110 East 14th Street. It paints a vibrant scene, with "prosperous clientele, with many strong German faces, speaking their native tongue with Otto or Fritz, the waiter, and enjoying the robust fare of the Fatherland." Luchow's remained a beloved staple for over a century before closing in 1986; its 14th Street building was demolished in 1995.

The introduction to [Dining, Wining, and Dancing in New York](#), published in 1938, asserts that despite the wide range of restaurants in NYC and the common practice of dining publicly, most New Yorkers are only familiar with a few favorite haunts, unlike the guide's author Scudder Middleton, a true "eater-around." His detailed recommendations are described in chapters that range from "10 Restaurants of the Premiere Order" and "Grand Hotels" to "All Over the Map" (international fare) and "Down in the Village," where he finds that the bohemian atmosphere is a thing of the past, absent since realtors began "jacking up the rent." For those seeking vestiges of the old ambience in the now commercialized district, he recommends [Romany Marie's](#) at 55 Grove Street, run by an old-timer who "tries nobly to keep the myth of Bohemianism going."

In 1939, two very different guidebooks captured the culinary scene. The catchily titled [Where to Dine in Thirty-Nine](#) by Diana Ashley contains a star-based pricing system, with a warning that a 3-star "expensive" dinner "will be at least \$2." Restaurants are listed alphabetically and indexed for neighborhood and nationality. Under "R," you'll find the modest [Café Royal](#) on Second Avenue, "frequented by Jewish actors and writers like Paul Muni, Eddie Cantor, Fannie Hurst," and the upscale [Rainbow Room](#), "the highest (65 floors up) restaurant in the world in every way." The Rainbow Room was [landmarked](#) in 2012 as "one of New York City's most elegant – and elevated – restaurant interiors."

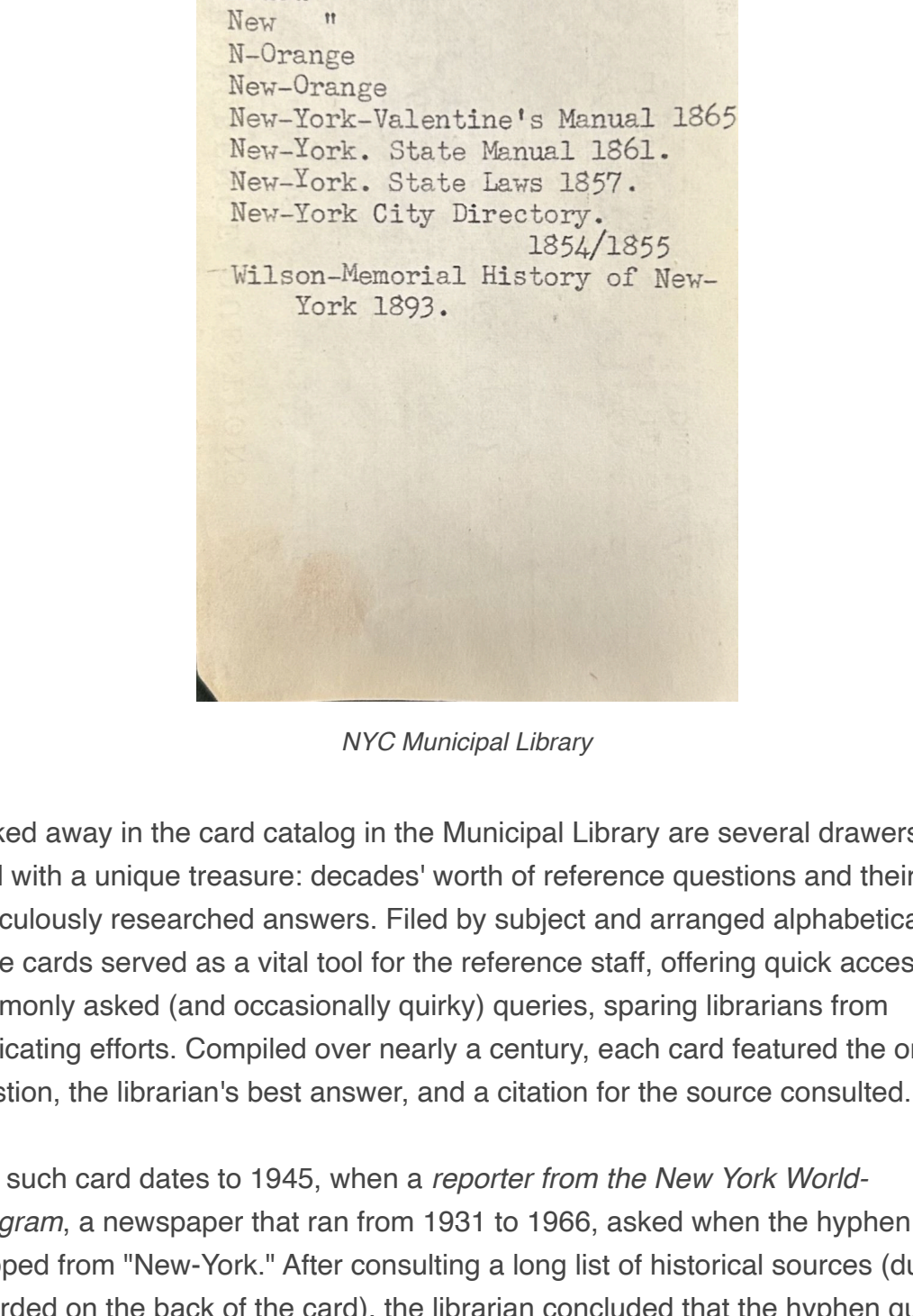
Also in 1939, Vogue editor Marjorie Hillis published [New York, Fair or No Fair: A Guide for the Woman Vacationist](#), with a title that references that year's World's Fair. In sections like "Breakfast to Tea" and "Cocktails and Dinner," Hill recommends dining spots such as the [New York Exchange for Women's Work](#) at 541 Madison Avenue for "delicious dinners as well as lunches and tea." She advises her readers not to frequent bars "in a solitary state," lest they look "either fast or forlorn." For social outings to hotspots where unaccompanied women are not permitted, she recommends calling the "Guide Escort Service at 116 East Fifty-Eighth Street," whose young men "all have college educations, perfect manners, and impeccable evening clothes."

The 1948 guide [Where to Eat in New York](#) by Robert Dana, food columnist for the New York World-Telegram, embraces the city's diversity. Its "Traveling Epicure" section includes the [Holland House Tavern](#), [Russian Kretchma](#), [Mecca Restaurant](#) (Syrian), [Miyako](#) (Japanese), [East India Restaurant](#), and [Semon's](#), said to be "the only Brazilian restaurant in the United States."



Where to Eat in New York, 1948. NYC Municipal Library.

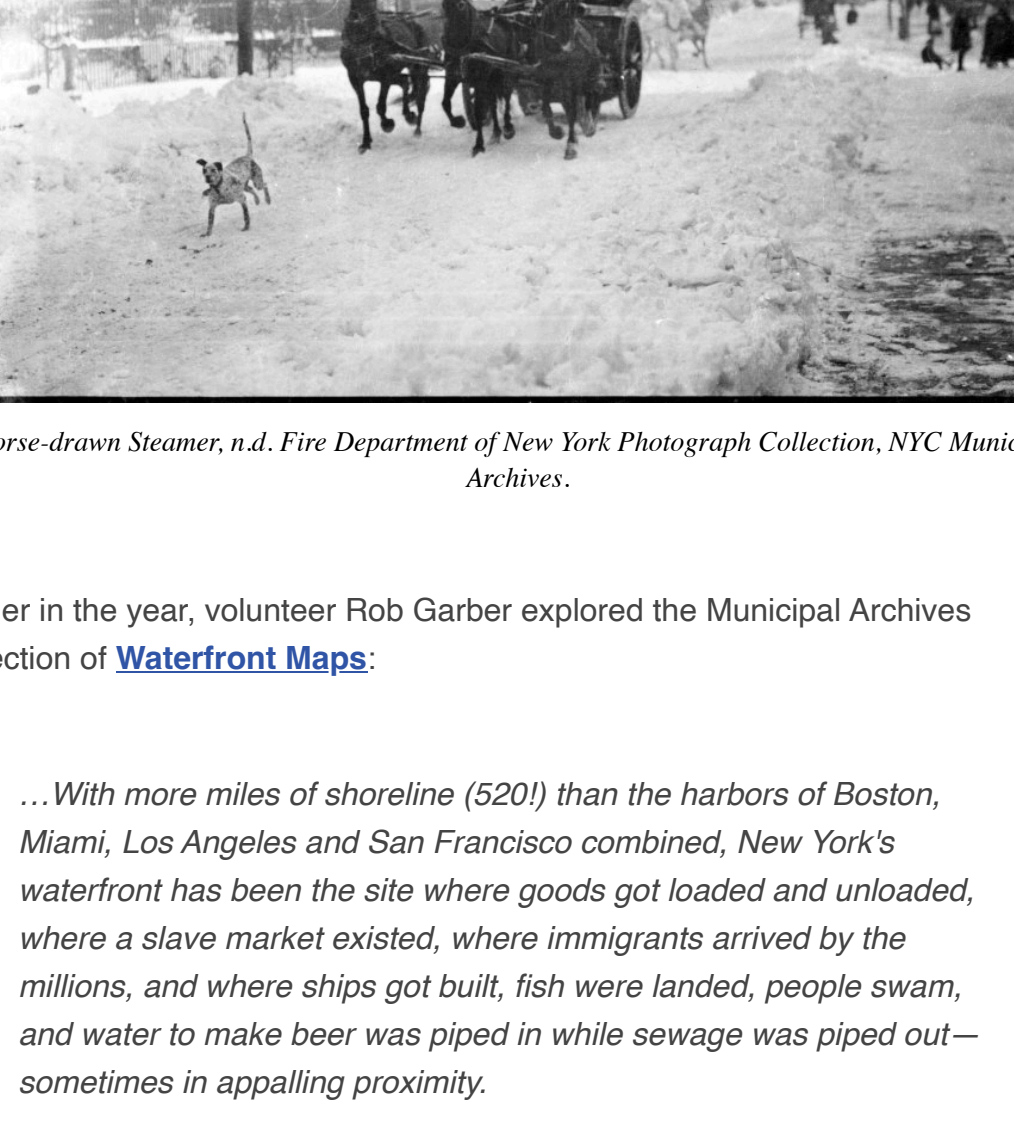
In 1955, Esquire's restaurant editor Harry Botsford compiled [New York's 100 Best Restaurants](#). His picks range from [Lee's](#) at 36 Pell Street, "located in romantic, colorful, and mysterious Chinatown," to the enduring [Oyster Bar](#) in Grand Central, where "customers consume some 10,000,000 oysters in a given eight-month period."



New York's 100 Best Restaurants, 1955. NYC Municipal Library.

A 1957 [Copp's Guide to New York City](#) for the Armed Forces features the famous [Automats](#), celebrated for their "excellent food and coffee," as well as the "big thrill" felt by visitors when they "drop in their nickles [sic] and get their food out of jail."

In 1964, a young Arthur Frommer published a [Practical Guide](#) to New York, which lists 80 of his favorite eateries. He praises the city's "multi-racial, multi-national character" that "makes an adventure of dining out in New York." The slim paperback still contains its discount coupons, including one for the multiple locations of [Longchamps Restaurants](#). (It won't be of much use though, as the coupon expired in 1965 and the upscale chain filed for bankruptcy ten years later.)



New York, A Practical Guide, 1964. NYC Municipal Library.

The compact 1966 [Hackmen's and Chauffeur's Guide](#), "published annually for the convenience of the professional driver," features 88 pages of alphabetical listings of restaurants throughout the boroughs (minus Staten Island) interspersed with occasional advertisements. There is no description or editorializing here, just a name and address along with a cross street.

Beyond the menus and dining rooms, the NYC Department of Health (DOH) has long played a role in shaping the city's dining scene. A 1954 training manual for [Grade II Health Inspectors](#) details the inspection protocols for the over 22,000 restaurants then under the purview of the "Retail Division" of the department's Environmental Sanitation Services.

In 1995, the Public Advocate's Office published [Food for Thought: An Investigation of the Accessibility of Restaurant Inspection Reports](#). It found that despite the occurrence of annual inspections, it was "very difficult" for New York City residents and tourists to get their hands on a restaurant's DOH inspection report, "and only 18% of restaurants produced the report upon request, as required by law. The report urged the city to create an automated restaurant telephone hotline, adding, presciently, that "DOH could also post this information on the Internet."

Today, diners can check inspection scores online through [ABCEats](#), the city's restaurant lookup tool that now includes over 29,000 establishments.

### From the Question Files: When Was the Hyphen Dropped?

REFERENCE QUESTIONS

**New York City**

Subject: When was the hyphen dropped from official name of New York?

Answer: Used - State Documents.  
Council Minutes - Mayor's Messages  
NYC History.  
Anytime between 1855 and 1861. (over)

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Inquiry made by: World-Telegram

☐ Letter ☐ Telephone ☐ In Person

Replied by: RBR Date 1/26/45

form 0521b-10 (3-15-48 2m)

|                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| City of New York                    | 1683      |
| City of New-York                    | 1776      |
| N-Amsterdam                         |           |
| Nieuw "                             |           |
| Nieuw "                             |           |
| New "                               |           |
| N-Orange                            |           |
| New-Orange                          |           |
| New-York-Valentine's Manual         | 1865      |
| New-York- State Manual              | 1861.     |
| New-York. State Laws                | 1857.     |
| New-York City Directory.            | 1854/1855 |
| Wilson-Memorial History of New-York | 1893.     |

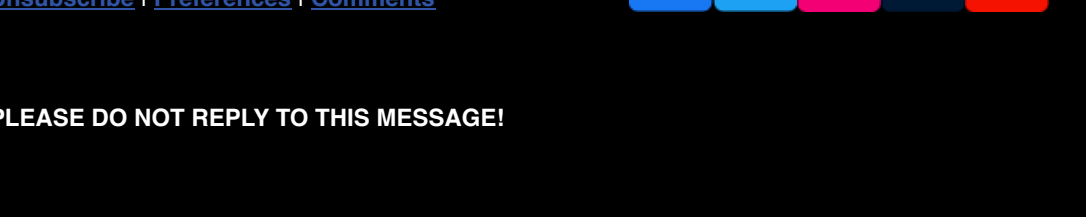
NYC Municipal Library

Tucked away in the card catalog in the Municipal Library are several drawers filled with a unique treasure: decades' worth of reference questions and their meticulously researched answers. Filed by subject and arranged alphabetically, these cards served as a vital tool for the reference staff, offering quick access to commonly asked (and occasionally quirky) queries, sparing librarians from duplicating efforts. Compiled over nearly a century, each card featured the original question, the librarian's best answer, and a citation for the source consulted.

One such card dates to 1945, when a *reporter from the New York World-Telegram*, a newspaper that ran from 1931 to 1966, asked when the hyphen was dropped from "New-York." After consulting a long list of historical sources (dutifully recorded on the back of the card), the librarian concluded that the hyphen quietly disappeared between 1855 and 1861. Interestingly, one notable holdout remained: the New-York Historical Society, which didn't officially retire its hyphen until 2024.

### For the Record: The Weekly Blog from the Municipal Archives and Library

Which City official wrote the testiest letters? How did the early Dutch colonists build the wall? For answers, look no further than our weekly blog, [For the Record](#). Recently, we highlighted a collection of early 20th Century [photographs from the Fire Department](#). Many are glass plate negatives, such as this image of a horse-drawn steamer and the dog accompanying the rig.



Horse-drawn Steamer, n.d. Fire Department of New York Photograph Collection, NYC Municipal Archives.

Earlier in the year, volunteer Rob Garber explored the Municipal Archives collection of [Waterfront Maps](#):

...With more miles of shoreline (520!) than the harbors of Boston, Miami, Los Angeles and San Francisco combined, New York's waterfront has been the site where goods got loaded and unloaded, where a slave market existed, where immigrants arrived by the millions, and where ships got built, fish were landed, people swam, and water to make beer was piped in while sewage was piped out—sometimes in appalling proximity.

From time to time, recently located material is shared as the "Find of the Week." Below is a certificate located in the Department of Parks and Recreation Collection. Why? [Read the blog](#) for the answer!



Certificate from an Official Three Stooges Fan Club kit, 1960. Department of Parks & Recreation Collection, NYC Municipal Archives.

For easy access to future editions, you can [become a subscriber](#) to receive the weekly update via email.



### DORIS Fall Public Programs: Exploring New York City's Diverse Past and Present

From a multispecies history of Central Park to a digital archive celebrating Latino and Caribbean culture and an inside look at the 1975 fiscal crisis that reshaped New York - this fall, DORIS presents a [rich lineup of programs](#) offering new perspectives on the city's history.

The season begins **Tuesday, September 9 at 6:00 p.m.** with a live, in-person recording of **Person Place Thing**, hosted by Randy Cohen. His guest will be NYC Department of Transportation Commissioner Ydanis Rodríguez, the first Latino and only the second person of color to hold the position.

#### September & October Highlights

• **September 10** – *Animating Central Park: A Multispecies History*  
Historian Dawn Day Biehler explores the intertwined lives of humans and nonhumans in Central Park.

• **September 16** – *NuevaYorkinos: Preserving Latino and Caribbean Stories*  
Djali Brown-Cepeda, founder of NuevaYorkinos, shares her multimedia project documenting pre-2020 NYC Latino and Caribbean culture and history.

• **October 9** – *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics*  
Dr. Kim Phillips-Fein, professor of history at Columbia University, recounts the dramatic events of the 1975 fiscal crisis and its lasting impact on the city. •

• **October 17–19** – *Open House New York Weekend at DORIS*  
Enjoy guided tours of our historic lobby in Lower Manhattan, our research facility in Sunset Park, and our current exhibition in collaboration with the New Amsterdam History Center, New Visions of Old New York.

[Learn more and register.](#)



### NYC Department of Records & Information Services Municipal Library Summer Reading Club

Read your way through the five boroughs! This summer, the Municipal Library at the NYC Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) invites you to fall in love with the city all over again, one book at a time. Choose any NYC-themed book —Manhattan mystery, Brooklyn biography, Harlem history—and tell us what you think! Share your NYC summer reading recommendation with the Municipal Library community, and you might see it featured on our social media.

Every entry you submit gets you a shot at fun NYC swag and eternal literary glory (well, maybe just some serious library love).

No required reading! Just you, your book, and your version of the city.

[Submit your summer reading recommendation here.](#)

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