FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

It’s Lunchtime at The New York Public Library with New, Free Exhibition

*Lunch Hour NYC* shares how New York City changed the midday meal

**June 13, 2012, New York, NY**—The clamor and chaos of lunch hour in New York has been a defining feature of the city for some 150 years. Now, The New York Public Library explores New York’s relationship with the midday meal in *Lunch Hour NYC*, a free exhibition opening at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street on Friday, June 22, 2012.

Organized in four thematic sections—quick-lunch, lunch at home, charitable lunch, and power lunch—*Lunch Hour NYC* reveals how the city’s pace and people have influenced where and what we eat. From kitchen tables to cafeterias, oysters to Jamaican beef patties, the changes in lunch reflect demographic shifts, economic development, and the city’s historic appetite for new foods.

While some classics endure—the “power lunch” restaurant has been with us since Delmonico’s set the standard in 1837—other features of the city’s culinary landscape have transformed over the years, especially in response to new waves of immigration.

“*Lunch Hour NYC* is the best kind of food story, full of familiar landmarks but with a history that’s new to most people,” said culinary historian Laura Shapiro, co-curator of the exhibition with NYPL Librarian Rebecca Federman. “If you want to explore the place where food, people, and New York City come together, it has to be lunch.”

Visitors will learn about the development of the public school lunch program in New York, which began as a charitable service for underserved children in 1908; how street foods like pretzels, pizza, and hot dogs gained their New York identity; how changing fashions contributed to the rise of salad and other diet food; and how the demographics of New York’s workforce guided the spread of new kinds of restaurants, including cafeterias and the Automat.

*Lunch Hour NYC* highlights books, pamphlets, photographs, menus, manuscripts, and memorabilia from various collections at The New York Public Library.

“One important feature of this exhibition is the chance to see some of the lesser-known treasures of the Library—the recipe pamphlets, for instance, and a manuscript cookbook—that really tell us about the history of everyday life,” said Librarian Rebecca Federman.
Specific items on view include:

- menus from restaurants like Schrafft’s, Delmonico’s, and Forum of the Twelve Caesars;
- Noah Webster’s personal, annotated copy of his 1841 dictionary, showing the entry for “lunch”;
- pages from the Horn & Hardart restaurant manager’s book, which instructed employees on preparing menu items and managing the shop;
- a reconstructed wall of Automat machines, including a peek at the back, where restaurant workers loaded the food;
- a mid-century business map of midtown Manhattan, which offers evidence of the number of eating establishments around Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street;
- photographs by Lewis Hine and Berenice Abbott;
- and famous caricatures that once hung on the walls of Sardi’s.

The exhibition features multimedia like film clips, songs, and interviews as well as interactive components, including a “10 cent meal” activity that explores how turn-of-the-century tenement housewives fed their families on very little income. Visitors will also be invited to lift the doors of the Automat and take home recipes based on those used in the famous Horn & Hardart restaurants.

A number of programs will be held throughout The New York Public Library system this summer in conjunction with Lunch Hour NYC, including cookbook-author talks at Mid-Manhattan Library, a neighborhood library summer film series, and storytelling events for children.

**Exhibition Details:**

**Lunch Hour NYC**  
**June 22, 2012–Feb 17, 2013**  
Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, Gottesman Exhibition Hall  
Fifth Ave at 42nd Street, Manhattan  
Monday, Thursday-Saturday: 10 a.m.– 6 p.m.  
Tuesday & Wednesday: 10 a.m.– 7:30 p.m.  
Closed Sundays in July and August; starting September, Sunday: 1– 5 p.m.  
[http://www.nypl.org/lunchhour](http://www.nypl.org/lunchhour)  
(917) ASK-NYPL (275-6975)  
Free admission

**Artwork available for publication:**

- “Lunch” entry in dictionaries by Johnson (1755) and Webster (1841)  
- Menu from Delmonico’s (1899)  
- Menu from Haim’s Quick-Lunch Restaurant (1906)
- Photographic portrait of Miss Frank E. Buttolph, who collected menus for the NYPL (circa 1910)
- Poster from the Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House, highlighting lunchtime (circa 1910s)
- Photograph of boys gathering for lunch at P.S. 40 (1919)
- “Unemployed: Buy Apples 5 c. Each” – placard from the Great Depression (1930)
- Photograph of an Automat at 977 Eighth Avenue, by Berenice Abbott (1936)
- Photograph of hot dog stand, by Berenice Abbott (1936)
- Photograph of a lunch venue with a deli counter (1942)

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This exhibition was curated by librarian Rebecca Federman and historian Laura Shapiro.

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