

BUYER BEWARE!

CONSUMERS' RESEARCH

AND THE

CONSUMER MOVEMENT, 1926 - 1980



Gallery '50 and
Special Collections and University Archives Gallery
Archibald Stevens Alexander Library
January 26 to April 15, 1995

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Curator: Gregory L. Williams

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BUYER BEWARE: CONSUMERS' RESEARCH AND THE CONSUMER MOVEMENT, 1926-1980

INTRODUCTION

Consumer testing and rating magazines are taken for granted at the end of the 20th century. Many of these product testing or rating publications have similar names, test the same products, and look alike. Before 1927 there were no guides or booklets for consumers to turn to for non-commercial advice on what products to buy. Consumers' Research was the first independent product rating and testing organization.

F.J. Schlink and Stuart Chase formed the first national Consumer Club in 1927 in response to the success of their bestselling book, *Your Money's Worth*. From a small beginning in New York City with several hundred subscribers, the Consumers' Club incorporated in 1929 and became Consumers' Research, Inc. By 1935 the organization had moved to Washington, New Jersey, and had over 50,000 subscribers and nearly 80 employees. Between 1930 and 1935, the organization was well known for its interest in radical causes. The whole idea of testing and rating products was considered radical because no one had ever done it before, it was criticized as anti-capitalist by manufacturers, and it was a great annoyance to advertisers. The early issues of the magazine, *Consumers' Research Bulletin*, not only gave detailed and opinionated analyses of products from cars to refrigerators and alarm clocks to men's socks, but also gave readers information on issues involved in food and drug control, depression era left-wing politics and issues important to the fledgling consumer movement. In 1935, CR employees concerned with wages, job security, and management style went out on strike. CR's management, led by F.J. Schlink, his wife M.C. Phillips, and former leftist radical J.B. Matthews, refused to negotiate. After a violent four month strike, nearly half of CR's staff did not return to work. Schlink's unwillingness to negotiate with the strikers (whom he claimed were Communists) left him in control of his organization, but isolated him from the consumer movement he had helped start. CR employees who had gone on strike formed a competing organization called Consumers Union (publishers of *Consumer Reports*) in 1936. Consumers Union enlisted initial support from many CR subscribers who felt betrayed by CR's anti-labor stance, was able to produce a slightly more attractive magazine, and through direct mail built up a subscriber base that easily overtook CR's circulation. For the next three decades, CR tried to blacklist its rival by claiming it was a Communist front.

Early testing of products was conducted by laboratories or consultants hired by CR. After moving to Washington, N.J., in 1933, CR conducted much more of its own product testing. Over the next 50 years, CR produced hundreds of small machines or gadgets to test how a product held up to stress, whether a product was reliable, and if advertised claims were true. These machines were designed to test razor blade sharpness, mattress-life, the durability of socks and other clothing, the brightness of fabrics, the reliability of pens or pencils, the viscosity of motor oils, and the strength of lamp cords. CR also had laboratory facilities to test the chemical properties of products, ingredients in foods, and the safety or performance of electrical equipment. Such equipment included household motors, stereos, televisions, radios, and many large appliances such as refrigerators, stoves, and dishwashers.

The Consumers' Research archives came to the Rutgers in 1984. In 1992 Special Collections and University Archives received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Library Resources Program to arrange, describe, and preserve the collection according to standard archival procedures. The collection is now available for researcher use in this revised form. An 800 page finding aid and an abridged guide have been produced to assist researchers. The collection consists of 885 cubic feet of administrative, general, and technical files. Included in these files are testing records, advertisements, packaging, labels, photographs, publications, and machinery.

This exhibition, *Buyer Beware*, is mounted in two galleries: the Special Collections and University Archives gallery documents CR history, product testing, and product packaging; Gallery '50 displays additional packaging and labels generated from CR's product testing.

BEGINNINGS OF THE CONSUMER MOVEMENT

"Do you buy [a brand] because Babe Ruth or Red Grange or the Queen of Roumania endorses a product--with full length portrait and signed testimonial?" *Your Money's Worth*.

"We are all Alices in a Wonderland of conflicting claims, bright promises, fancy packages, soaring words, and almost impenetrable ignorance." *Your Money's Worth*.

The first meetings relating to the establishment of a consumer product rating organization took place during a men's group function at a White Plains, New York, church on March 23, 1926. At the same time the New Republic began publishing articles by engineer F.J. Schlink and economist Stuart Chase. These articles were later published in the bestselling book *Your Money's Worth*. The *Consumers' Club Commodity List*, the first consumer testing and rating guide, was published by F.J. Schlink on October 27, 1927, for members of the Consumers' Club. A few months later the *List* was revised and by 1929 Consumers' Research began to publish periodical bulletins in addition to an annual review of products. *Scientific Buying* (1929) was the first CR publication to appear professionally printed. When CR adopted a regular schedule of publications, it rated products as follows: recommended, intermediate, and not recommended. CR publications included *Consumers' Research Confidential Bulletin Service* (1930-1932), *Consumers' Research Confidential Bulletin* (1934-1935), *Consumers' Research General Bulletin* (1931-1935), *Consumers' Research Handbook of Buying* (1930-1935), *Consumers' Research Bulletin* (1935-1937), *Consumers Bulletin* (1957-1973), *Consumers' Research Magazine* (1973-present), *Special Bulletins* (1928-1942), *Consumers Bulletin Annual* (1936-1973), *Consumers' Research Magazine Handbook of Buying Issue* (1973-1980), and *Consumer's Digest* (1937-1941).

EARLY POLITICAL ISSUES

CR became involved in several political issues related to food and drug controls and government protection of the consumer. CR called for the establishment of a cabinet level Department of the Consumer in 1934 in the pamphlet *Discovering Consumers*. The 1933 "open letter" to President Roosevelt called for more federal protection of consumers. During its early years, CR's fear of lawsuits by manufacturers who received bad ratings caused it to impose restrictions on access to its publications. These "confidential" publications were restricted to subscribers and their families. Readers were instructed to destroy their copies as soon as they were read. Also shown are two *New Yorker* cartoons, a photograph of F.J. Schlink, and another photograph of CR headquarters.

100,000,000 GUINEA PIGS

In 1932, Schlink and CR board member Arthur Kallet published *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*. The wildly successful book called for stricter food and drug controls to protect the consumer from contaminated food and drugs such as patent medicines. The poster and broadsides in this case document the book's success. "IF YOU EAT--YOU MUST READ *100,000,000 GUINEA PIGS*." The publicity for this bestselling book bordered on the hysterical, but the message was clear. Hidden ingredients such as lead and arsenic might be in food. Cosmetics and other products were quite possibly dangerous to consumers' health. While promoting knowledge as the best means of protecting consumers, Kallet and Schlink used scare tactics. They cited the example of a German army officer who committed suicide in 1910 by swallowing several tubes of Pebsco toothpaste which contained the poison potassium chlorate.

CR published several books in the 1930's that were dedicated to exposing the exaggerations and lies of advertisers and the dangers of everyday products such as canned fruits, hair removal cosmetics, toothpaste, and aspirin. These books were labelled "Guinea Pig" books partially because of Schlink and Kallet's bestselling *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs* and partially because they were both alarmist and muckraking. Other books not shown include *Skin Deep* by M.C. Phillips; *Guinea Pigs No More* and *Partners in Plunder* by J.B. Matthews; and *Eat, Drink and Be Wary* by F.J. Schlink.

F.J. SCHLINK

Photograph (ca. 1933) of Frederick J. Schlink (1891-1995), founder, president, and technical director of Consumers' Research, 1927-1981; Assistant to the Secretary of the American Standards Association, 1922-1931; and co-author of *Your Money's Worth* and *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*. Schlink died on January 15 at the age of 103.

ARTHUR KALLET

Photograph (ca. 1933) of Arthur Kallet (1902-1972), early board member of Consumers' Research, 1930-1934; CR Board Secretary, 1934-1935; CR Strike leader, 1935; co-founder and director of Consumers Union, 1936-1957; Assistant to the Secretary of the American Standards Association, 1931-1933; and co-author *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*.

MANAGEMENT

"The striking members of CR's staff have indulged in a kind and degree of violence which has shocked many old-timers in the labor movement. One experienced observer has expressed the opinion that never before in the history of strikes in this country have there been such irresponsible outbursts of violence in a strike of such small proportions." *Consumers' Research General Bulletin*, October 1935.

THE UNION

"This strike is, alas, "an ordinary strike." All the advantages of the situation, power and money are being used against the strikers. All the usual strike-breaking methods of big business have been used against the strikers--violence, armed thugs . . . , cries of communism, threats of vigilante action." "The Strike at Consumers' Research--The Union's Reply to the Management's statement."

CONSUMERS' RESEARCH STRIKE

In the summer of 1935 a group of Consumers' Research employees organized a union to address grievances concerning low wages, job insecurity, and managerial autocracy. CR's Board of Directors led by F.J. Schlink, M.C. Phillips and J.B. Matthews fired three union members including the union president and also fired board member Dewey Palmer and CR board secretary Arthur Kallet. Over 50 union members struck on September 4th. CR, once considered a bastion of liberalism, socialism, and even communism, fought the union at every step. While rural Washington, New Jersey, seemed an odd place for a strike, the strike soon became national news. CR hired replacement workers, took out restraining orders against picketers, hired armed guards, and claimed that the union was part of an plot by the Communist party to takeover the organization.

THE STRIKERS

The union fought back with stones, parades, rallies, and a hunger strike in the Warren County jail. Throughout the strike, members of several liberal organizations including the ACLU attempted to arbitrate a settlement. Consumers' Research subscribers even tried to organize and get management to settle the strike. Finally, the union took its case to the National Labor Relations Board. The NLRB found Consumers' Research had unfairly fired its employees and ordered CR to re-hire the union members. CR ignored the ruling. The strike was called off. Early in 1936 Arthur Kallet, Dewey Palmer, and other former CR employees or supporters formed Consumers Union. Schlink and Phillips stayed in control of the smaller, much more isolated organization for the next 45 years. This case includes management, union, and mediators' statements, post-cards documenting anti-CR sentiments, wooden picket signs, and photographs showing the strikers and damage to CR buildings and cars.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CONSUMERS UNION

"The difference between CR and CU . . . is as great as that between America and Russia." CR editor, M.C. Phillips, 1947, to a student who wanted to know the difference between the two competing consumer organizations.

For 40 years Consumers' Research campaigned to discredit Consumers Union. CR claimed CU was a "transmission belt" for the Communist Party and a Communist Front organization. Though it caused inconvenience and personal hardship for CU board members, the campaign didn't work. In the end the CR's bitter enmity to its former employees wasted subscribers money. "The Company They Keep" and "Let's Look at the Record" posters were among many efforts by CR to discredit CU. The list of names in this case are among the "Red Rope" files duplicated for inquiring committees or individuals. In 1938 former CR Vice-President J.B. Matthews became research director for the House Un-American Activities Committee headed by Martin Dies. With assistance from CR, Matthews and Dies released a report in 1939 detailing what they believed to be communist influences in the consumer movement. CR also assisted many journalists writing anti-CU articles. Consumers' Research continued to track Consumers Union and its officers affiliations long after the red-scare of the 1950's.

CONSUMERS UNION

Despite CR's attempts to color the organization un-American, Consumers Union thrived and its publication, *Consumer Reports*, became the most popular consumers magazine in the U.S., leaving Consumers' Research's publications a distant second in popularity. The first issue of *Consumers Union Reports* shown here was published in 1936. On the masthead are several former CR employees and Board members. Also displayed are other early CU publications. The "Outline of Organization and Services of Proposed Consumers' Technical Union of U.S." is actually a re-statement of many of the ideals F.J. Schlink strived to put into place when he started Consumers' Research.

AUTOMOBILES

"The automobile is a complex and delicate mechanism, for which the consuming public pays out one of the largest sums of the family budget, and about which it is for the greater part almost entirely ignorant or completely so. Where makers should impart the most painstaking technical information, they supply instead misleading and irrelevant sales ballyhoo." *Confidential Consumers' Research Bulletin*, May 1935.

Consumers' Research first mentioned automobiles in 1928 for the second issue of the *Consumers' Club Commodity List*. The *List* deemed the new Ford car a "remarkable development" and a second-hand Chevrolet to be a good buy. These simple automobile performance ratings were the first to appear in a consumer-oriented publication. Next came the annual issue devoted to cars. Tests conducted were the forerunners of the multitude of current independent automobile analyses. The car catalogues (1932-1938) in this case offer glamorous images of well-dressed men and women out on the town in their luxury sedans, an image that contradicted the reality of the Depression. CR rated low, mid-range, and higher priced cars. CR's ratings of cars focused on value, mechanical details, and comfort. CR also rated or commented on used cars, oils, gasoline, auto heaters, defrosters, and auto gadgets.

TESTING MACHINERY

Consumers' Research initially sent products for testing to outside laboratories. In 1933 when the organization moved to New Jersey its expanded headquarters allowed more space for product testing. About this time CR began designing its own testing apparatus or machines. The machines were often re-designed or improved upon over time. Some machines were purchased from outside companies. CR had various machines to test tile or carpet, toasters, televisions, egg beaters, socks, toothbrushes, and many other products. Some of CR's testing activities are listed in this case. The Whippet egg beater was tested in 1935. The Crockmeter in this case was used to test the effect of wear on color in fabrics. CR even produced a test manual in 1937 for its subscribers to test products at home.

IRON TESTING

Consumers' Research used electric steam iron testers to determine potential shock hazards in the irons. CR was also interested in the plugged-up or erratic steam, hindrances in the formation of steam, hot spots on the iron, total steam time, spray feature, thermostat control, thumb rests, and cord safety. The irons featured in this case were tested in 1946 or 1947 and 1959. The scorch swatches in the case were used to help determine an iron's adverse effects on fabric during the 1959-1960 tests. Other items shown include advertisements for Betty Crocker brand and other irons.

CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

Consumers' Research tested, rated, and studied thousands of products for the home. Each new technological development brought new questions. Was the sound coming from a radio satisfactory? Was the reception on a new television worth the price paid? Did a stereo live up to its advertisements? More often than not Consumers' Research found that advertising claims were exaggerated, but products with sufficient engineering and ease of use were acceptable. The collection is rich in promotional literature for early examples of such consumer electronics as televisions, radios and stereos. Included are advertisements featuring George Burns and Gracie Allen, a 1948 Magnovox television, results of a test conducted on a 1950 Zenith television, and a 1952 advertising booklet illustrated by Doctor Suess entitled "What is a Wild Tone" which promotes Stromberg-Carlson speakers.

TOOTHBRUSHES

"Children should not be forced to use tooth pastes in common use today because of sharp and sweet tastes and odors which are, generally speaking, wholly distasteful to the child and in time will corrupt his food-and-beverage taste appreciations toward the undesirable qualities of spiciness and sweetness." *Handbook of Annual Buying*, September 1935.

"A short narrow toothbrush with a convex or straight brushing surface of uneven trim but without a tuft at the end is probably the best type. The bristles should be short, not too harsh, and should have the tufts widely separated to allow satisfactory cleaning." *Handbook of Annual Buying*, September 1935.

TOOTHBRUSH TESTING MACHINE

Consumers' Research tested toothbrushes to establish how long the product would last, the effectiveness of the bristles, and if it got consumers' teeth clean. The photograph of a 1936 toothbrush apparatus is an earlier version of the partial apparatus in the case. In an attempt to duplicate the long-term use of toothbrushes, a type of wire mesh was placed under the test-toothbrushes and the toothbrushes were mechanically "brushed" against this mesh. Included in the case are advertisements and packages for the Tefra and Prophylactic brands of toothbrushes. CR's September 1935 annual buying guide branded these toothbrushes "not recommended." The 1963 version of Dr. West's electric toothbrush kit failed to pass CR's tests. An earlier, non-electric Dr. West toothbrush was also not recommended in the September 1935 issue. Also included in this case is a 1935 package of a "Sanit" toothpaste produced in the U.S.S.R.

SOCK TESTER

"The quest for the perfect or very good pair of men's socks, which has gone on for a number of years, still continues." *Consumers' Research Bulletin*, December 1938.

This sock or hose testing machine was probably built in the mid-1930's. The machine was designed to compare the resistance to abrasion of the toe, heel, and high splice of men's socks. The sock was secured on a smooth (porcelain) door knob, and rubbed mechanically back and forth over a wire (abrading) mesh surface. An electrically operated counter registered the number of strokes before the fabric wore through. This machine was used for several different textiles.

RAZOR BLADE TESTERS

Long before the advent of disposable shavers, Consumers' Research was very much concerned with the sharpness and life of razor blades. CR developed several devices to test razor blades. Both the early wooden razor-tester and the 1951 metal razor-tester were used to rate the effectiveness of razor blades. Strips of paper were used in the machine to evaluate the keenness of each razor edge and the uniformity of the blades.

KITCHEN APPLIANCES

Consumers' Research tested kitchen appliances annually. The tests focused on big-ticket items such as refrigerators, stoves, and dishwashers, but CR didn't shy away from looking at odd or innovative gadgets designed to make life in the kitchen easier. The brochures and advertisements in this case are representative of several thousands of product-oriented materials in the collection.

SHAVING CREAMS

"A good 5-cent cake of shaving soap will enable one to have as satisfactory a shave as will a shaving stick or a cream that costs ten or twenty times more to use. Advertising claims of different brands for unique efficacy are mostly sheer nonsense. The only purpose served by lathering shaving soaps or creams is to soften the beard by bringing and holding water in contact with it." *Consumers' Research Bulletin Annual Cumulative Number*, September 1939.

Evidence of CR's interest in shaving creams is found in the multitude of packaging in the collection. In an attempt to find its male subscribers the best, most smooth shave, CR also rated shaving cremes or soaps. This case contains brands of shaving cream such as Mennen, Williams, Lifebouy, Lavender, Listerine, and Colgate. Most of the contents of these packages were tested in the mid-1930's.

CAN LABELS

Studies conducted in the 1930's for Consumers' Research compared differing brands of canned fruit or vegetables and noted the varying colors, tastes, cost, and net weight of stated on the label in relation to the volume of liquid and the weight of the product in the can. CR used its laboratories to compare competing brands of canned foods, and also kept subscribers informed of any developments relating to the adulteration of food, potential health threats (ptomaine poisoning or botulism), and U.S.D.A. grading of canned foods. The cans in this case are representative of the brands and foods CR rated between 1932 and 1937.

NYLONS

The nylons in this case were tested by the U.S. Testing Co. of Hoboken for Consumers' Research. Nylons were tested for strength, runs, and whether they faded after several washings. Included are nylons as they were originally made and a matching pair after an intensive washing. The New Yorker cartoon is indicative of some consumers' exasperation over CR's criticism of almost everything on the market.

MEN'S UNDERWEAR

Consumers' Research's work with men's underwear included tests on elasticity, strength of fabrics, and comfort. The case contains advertisements for Short-EEZ, Jockey, and other brands of underwear (1936-1938). Another Jockey ad is from 1949. The page with underwear ads and labels is from testing conducted in 1938. The chart is from 1932 and the "Men's Shorts" report is from 1950.

CONSUMERS' RESEARCH COLLECTION POSTERS

Many of the food posters Consumers' Research collected exclaimed the benefits of certain types of food, but, in CR's view, the posters were thinly veiled attempts by industry and trade groups to get consumers to use their products more frequently. The "Wheel of Good Eating" was produced by the American Institute of Baking and "Milk Made the Difference" was produced by the National Dairy Council.

DEPILATORIES

"It is wise not to experiment with unknown cosmetics, particularly depilatories... So far [1933] no powder, lotion, or cream has been found to accomplish this [a permanent method to remove superfluous hair]. This simple and indisputable fact, however, does not deter ignorant or unscrupulous manufacturers and advertising copy writers from making broad claims of safe and easy depilation. Nor are such practices confined to shyster firms." *Annual Handbook of Buying*, 1933.

Koremlu, a depilatory product on the market in the early 1930's, was supposed to permanently remove unwanted body hair. But numerous complaints revealed the extent of the skin damage Koremlu would cause. One active ingredient in Koremlu was thallium acetate, a deadly rat poison. The documents in this case follow Consumers' Research's investigation into stores in New York that sold Koremlu, tracked Koremlu advertisements in fashion magazines, corresponded with the manufacturer, and documented many cases of serious skin damage to women who used the product. Koremlu filed for bankruptcy in 1932 with a \$2,000,000 debt mostly from lawsuits. A depilatory product that came on the scene just after Koremlu was Croxon. CR claimed Croxon was "worthless as a depilatory."

COSMETICS

"If one is to believe the advertisements currently appearing in woman's magazines, one of woman's chief worries is how to keep from losing her man. If the ads present the picture correctly, many a woman must be sitting up wondering whether he went away because it was "B.O." due to failure to use Lifebuoy soap; "annoying little blemishes" which could have been corrected by the use of Resinol ointment and soap; "faulty make-up" due to her failure to use Luxor moisture-proof face powder; "poor cooking" due to her failure to use Brer Rabbit molasses in her gingerbread; "crepey throat" which could have been overcome by Frances Denney's Herbal Throat and Neck Blend; "cosmetic skin" because she failed to use Lux toilet soap; or "rough chapped hands" because she failed to use Jergens lotion. Hokum, dear ladies, mere hokum" *Consumers' Research General Bulletin*, April 1935.

HAND LOTIONS AND NAIL POLISH

Consumers' Research was quite skeptical about the claims advertisers made for cosmetics. CR researchers were also concerned about the possible side effects certain cosmetics had on the skin. Nail polish, face powders, hand lotions, and lipstick promised a more perfect look, but CR's investigations revealed the questionable

chemicals and possible health hazards of such products. The packaging and advertisements in this case reveal the variety of cosmetics that CR tested or studied. *Skin Deep* by M.C. Phillips, an investigation into the cosmetics industry, was a bestseller in 1934. Each year the CR's *Annual Cumulative Bulletin* devoted a section to cosmetics and toiletries. Chemical testing of hand lotions concerned their glycerin content.

SHAMPOO & LIPSTICK

The lipstick containers and packages consist of products tested in 1950. Other, more colorful lipstick packaging was purchased for testing in 1936-1938. CR tested lipsticks for chemical content, coloring material in the product, possible skin irritation and if advertised claims were true. CR purchased products on the open market and analyzed them in its own laboratory or sent the products to outside laboratories such as Twining Labs. Advertising and packaging of shampoo and other hair products were purchased for testing in the late 1940's. Cold Permanent Wave kits were also among the products tested in 1946.

SOAP ATTACKS B.O.

"Without them you will soon find yourself hairless, toothless, afflicted with halitosis and B.O., and a little later you will die a horrible death from a combination of twenty or thirty dangerous diseases the germs of which are lingering in your mouth or on door knobs, waiting anxiously to pounce on your vital organs the first morning on which you forget to gargle with Listerine or Pepsodent, or to wash your hands with Lifebuoy." *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*, page 63.

While advertisers of soap claimed they were interested in protecting the consumer from body odor and more serious diseases such as polio, they also implied that use of their soap would lead to a more glamorous life like that of movie star Bette Davis. Consumers' Research countered that soap in pretty packages and alluring perfumes were essentially useless. The soap wrappers in this case are taken from the files of the tests CR conducted in late 1930's. The advertisements date up to 1950.

LAWNMOWERS

As Americans moved to the suburbs in the 1950's, the need for lawnmowers increased greatly. Consumers' Research focused on the safety factors involved with lawnmowers, how well an electric mower ran, and whether it was good at cutting the grass. Included are advertisements from the 1950's, photographs of lawnmower testing, and copies of the *CR Bulletin*.

VELVEETA

Consumers' Research was particularly interested in processed cheese and other processed foods, the fat content of beef, the differences between butter and margarine, the effects of milk, and beverages such as coffee, tea, and soft drinks. Packages, advertisements, newspaper clippings, and FDA reports in this case concern the processed cheese product, Velveeta. Writer and historian Bernard DeVoto made an off-hand comment about the taste of processed cheese in a 1938 column for *Harpers*. Kraft, the makers of Velveeta, demanded a retraction despite the fact that DeVoto didn't even mention the product. DeVoto and *Harpers* then turned to CR for scientific support. Material in this case dates between 1932 and 1957. Included are the crystals one CR subscriber allegedly found in her Velveeta.

PACKAGING

"For a decade or more, millions of homemakers . . . have been conditioned to accept attractiveness and neatness of packaging and convenience in use as primary values in food buying. As a result, supermarket shoppers now buy without question coal-tar dyed oranges and potatoes (to name two of hundreds of possible examples) that look pretty, in preference to oranges and potatoes as nature produced them. All too many housewives have been conditioned to accept uniformity of size and color, "sanitary" packaging, lack of visible insect damage, and other purely superficial qualities as complete substitutes for basic food qualities." *Consumer Bulletin--Annual*, 1963-1964.

FOOD PACKAGING

Consumers' Research took a great interest in the way products were presented to the public. In addition it was concerned with the nutrition, preservatives, and pesticide residue in processed and other foods. It warned subscribers against deceptive packaging and joined in the debate during the early 1960's that led to passage of fair packaging laws. Most of the packaging and articles in this case are dated 1958-1970. They include macaroni, donuts, cereals, frozen dinners, dog food, brownies, and other products. The complaint about the "tasteless" Jersey Corn Flakes is from a subscriber who wrote CR in 1936. *Meat Three Times a Day* (1946), by F.J. Schlink and his wife, M.C. Phillips, dealt with American's love affair with meat. The poster entitled "Foods Rich in Energy Chart" was produced by the Council on Candy of the National Confectioners' Association.

COLLECTION SUMMARY

CONSUMERS RESEARCH, INC. RECORDS, 1910-1983 (BULK 1928-1980)

885 CU. FT.

Organized into three sequences: I. Administrative Files, 1917-1983. II. General Files, 1910-1980. III. Technical Files, 1914-1983.

Consumers' Research was incorporated in New York City in 1929 as a result of the success of F.J. Schlink's and Stuart Chase's book *Your Money's Worth*. The organization was first formed as the Consumers' Club in 1927. Consumers' Research, Inc., tested and rated consumer products and disseminated the results of those findings to subscribers. The organization moved to Washington, N.J., in 1933. Under the direction of F.J. Schlink, Consumers' Research pioneered consumer testing in the United States. Authors of several "guinea pig" books exposing the deceit of many manufacturers in the early 1930's, Consumers' Research's staff contributed the bulk of their efforts to the publication of *Consumers' Research Bulletin*, *Consumers Bulletin*, *Consumers' Research Magazine* and annual guides to consumer products. Early alliances with liberal groups and publications ended with a violent and unsuccessful strike by Consumers' Research employees in 1935. Because Consumers' Research board members believed the strike was Communist led, the political focus of CR became stridently anti-Communist. In 1936, the dismissed strikers and their supporters formed Consumers Union which publishes *Consumer Reports*. Throughout the 50 years between 1930 and 1980, Consumers' Research consistently tested and rated products ranging from toasters to lawn mowers, automobiles to cameras. Consumers' Research tested products until 1983 in Washington, N.J., although the *Consumers' Research Magazine* was published in Washington, D.C., beginning in 1981.

This collection documents the operations of Consumers' Research, Inc., a pioneering consumer testing and rating agency, the evolution and reliability of hundreds of consumer products throughout the twentieth century, consumer education and organizations, and a wide spectrum of left-wing and anti-Communist political views held or investigated by CR.

The collection consists of Technical Files (339 cubic feet) relating to products tested and rated by Consumers' Research including product information, many product photographs, packaging, advertisements, and specific test results; General Files (425 cubic feet) relating to foods, food adulteration, cosmetics, medicine, tobacco, politics including anti-Communism and fellow travelers, the consumer during World War II, consumerism, Consumers Union, merchandise marketing, government and the consumer during the New Deal, the Consumers' Research strike (1935), and Food & Drug Administration legislation; and Administrative Files (105 cubic feet) concerning the operation of Consumers' Research, organizational goals and history, and circulation of CR's publications including subscriber correspondence, policies, legal matters, speeches, personnel files, Board of Directors minutes, financial materials, publicity and promotion, manuscripts and reviews of books such as F.J. Schlink and Arthur Kallet's *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*, and CR's assistance to educational and other organizations.

Records relating to products, services, theories, and individuals investigated include advertising, automobiles, cameras, cleaning products, clothing, cooperative organizations, economics and business, electric toasters, fraud, front organizations, household appliances, insurance, labor law, lawn mowers, paints, product standards and standardization, poisons, radios, razor blades, science and engineering, televisions, trade unions, and washing machines.

Other organizations represented include Consumer Federation of America, National Labor Relations Board, National Recovery Administration, Underwriters Laboratory, and American National Standards Institute. Persons represented include Frederick J. Schlink, M.C. Phillips, J.B. Matthews, Dewey Palmer, Arthur Kallet, Ralph Nader, Stuart Chase and Consumers' Research lawyer William A. Consodine.

CONSUMERS' RESEARCH HISTORY

"Why do you buy one make of automobile rather than another?"

"Why do you buy the tooth paste you are using--what do you know about its relative merits compared with other tooth pastes--do you know if it has, beyond a pleasant taste, any merit at all?"

These questions posed at the beginning of the bestselling book *Your Money's Worth* by F.R. Schlink and Stuart Chase represented a challenge to American consumers to begin questioning the claims of advertisers and private industry.¹ After decades of quiet frustration about the quality and safety of consumer goods and services, consumers were suddenly given the ammunition they needed to question the quality of the merchandise they purchased and their reliance on advertising. Schlink and Chase defined the "ultimate consumer" as the person who finally eats, wears, lives in, or uses up, the things industry and agriculture have made or grown.²

Stuart Chase and F.J. Schlink met in the mid-1920's while Chase worked on his book, *The Tragedy of Waste*. Schlink assisted Chase in gathering research materials. Soon, they published a two-part article called "A Few Billion for Consumers," in the December 30, 1925, and the January 6, 1926, *New Republic*. About three months later, on March 23, 1926, Chase and Schlink were to speak on product standards to a men's group at a White Plains, New York church. This was to be "a non-technical talk on some of the remarkable gains to be made in the purchases of every day life through standards of quality, performance and efficiency."³ It is not clear if Chase attended the meeting, but Schlink was appointed to a committee of the men's club to formulate a method to judge "the relative value of commodities." The information when gathered was to be disseminated to club and church members as well as the general public.⁴

Meanwhile, the *New Republic* published a five-part series entitled "Consumers in Wonderland" in February and March, 1927. These articles, as well as the two earlier articles, were excerpts from the soon-to-be-published *Your Money's Worth*. The articles created a stir and were mentioned in three other issues between April and June. The first reviews of *Your Money's Worth* appeared in July of 1927 when it was a selection for the Book of the Month Club. Columbia professor Rexford Guy Tugwell noted in a review that products "from toothpaste and shaving soap to houses and clothes, all our modern paraphernalia, with certain honorable exceptions, be it said, will henceforth be regarded with deep suspicion."⁵ Another review stated that the book was a "plea for scientific purchasing; it argues that everything is sold, almost everything is oversold, [and] the time has come for the consumer not to be sold something but to go out and buy it."⁶ In the book, the authors state that one of them has "established an information service and rudimentary experiment station administered as a "Consumer Club."⁷

By the end of 1927, Schlink and Chase formed the Consumers' Club, an informal outgrowth of the White Plains group, because of the overwhelming response to *Your Money's Worth* and due to the encouragement of many intellectual acquaintances around New York City.

¹ Stuart Chase and F.J. Schlink. *Your Money's Worth*. The MacMillan Company, New York, 1927, pp. 1, 24.

² *Your Money's Worth*, p. 5.

³ White Plains Community Church Calendar for March 1926. Consumers' Research Records, Box 23/15.

⁴ Kenneth Allen to F.J. Schlink, March 24, 1926. CR Box 23/15.

⁵ "Contemporary Buncombe," *New York Review of Literature*, July 9, 1927. CR box 63.

⁶ "Iconoclasm, More Buying, Less Selling," *Tide*, July 1927. CR box 63.

⁷ *Your Money's Worth*, page 254.

The *Consumers' Club Commodity List*,⁸ published on October 27, 1927, consisted of 21 pages plus a few pages of introduction. In the foreward, Schlink explained the *List* was a first step toward giving the small consumer the same type of access to information on product quality tests that the Federal Government and other large agencies had. The early intention of the Club was to revise the *List* or send out a supplement once a year. Schlink, always worried about potential libel suits, stated that the *List* was "purely a series of suggestions" intended for members and their immediate families. The *List* consisted of two columns subdivided by various products. The "A" column was for recommended products and commodities while the "B" column was for products and commodities the compilers did not recommend. No direct testing of products took place for this first issue. Several sources were used and in some cases the reports of correspondents were used. These sources included government bureaus such as the U.S. Bureau of Standards, the American Medical Association, *1001 Tests* by Dr. Harvey Wiley (1916), *Education of the Consumer* by Henry Harap (1924)⁹ and *Your Money's Worth*. Schlink also included notes on the cost of products, if an item was exceptionally good, and where to obtain wholesale prescription drugs. Products or commodities investigated include disinfectants, ink, textiles, silver polish, soap (Ivory recommended, Lifebouy not recommended), paint, syrup, breakfast foods (yes to Shredded Wheat, no to Cream of Wheat), bottled beverages (recommended Hires Root Beer, did not recommend Coca Cola--"if drunk too freely, or by children, may do harm"), refrigerators, toasters, radios, cameras (yes to German-made cameras, no to expensive Kodak cameras), and typewriters (yes to Underwood, no to Remington).

By January 1928, offers for membership in the Consumers' Club began to appear.¹⁰ Schlink noted that the Club would develop a "laboratory devoted without commercial restraint of any kind to setting up a genuine science of consumption and so far as necessary, debunking the more extravagant of the claims of the high pressure workers in the field of advertising and salesmanship."¹¹ Though they did not incorporate the "Consumers Club," Schlink and Chase were able to get several academics and scientists to sign on as part of a sponsoring committee. These included the professor Wesley Mitchell, the lawyer Morris Ernst, and Schlink's boss at the American Standards Association, Paul G. Agnew.¹²

In March 1928, the second issue or, rather, the first revision was sent out to subscribers. Taking into account many letters from engineers, technicians, and home economists, the *List* was expanded to include several more products including mouthwash and automobiles. The second list deemed the new Ford car a "remarkable development" and a second-hand Chevrolet a good buy.¹³

In the second to last chapter of *Your Money's Worth*, Schlink and Chase called for the establishment of a Consumers Foundation. This Foundation would need to be funded by "a multi-millionaire of an inquiring turn of mind" to create a laboratory and information bureau "sufficiently large to make a real impression upon buyer's consciousness."¹⁴ Such a Foundation "would go a long way towards deflating poetry in the advertising columns." Acting on this idea, Schlink drafted a "Memorandum For the Establishment of The Consumers Foundation" by late summer, 1927. Schlink, in his proposal, called for the establishment of "a strictly impartial,

⁸ *Consumers' Club Commodity List*, October 27, 1927. White Plains, NY.

⁹ Harap, Henry. *The Education of the Consumer, A Study in Curriculum Material*, Macmillan Co., New York, 1924.

¹⁰ A notice in the January 15, 1928 edition of *Survey*, a social work periodical, offered membership in the Consumers Club.

¹¹ F.J. Schlink to Charles F. Brush, April 13, 1929. CR box 18/16.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Consumers' Club Commodity List*, March 1928, second edition. CR box 65/2.

¹⁴ *Your Money's Worth*, p. 245.

scientific, non-profit making, goods-investigating body to be financed by private subscription and various other services." Pretty much along the lines of the suggestion in the book, Schlink called for two cooperating bodies: a clearinghouse to gather, file, and digest test material on consumer goods, and a laboratory "to carry on actual testing work, to fill in the gaps in fields now tested by other agencies, and to invade new fields." He suggested a budget of around \$80,000 for the first year and \$75,000 for the second year. Schlink also suggested affiliating with cooperatives, labor unions, buyers clubs, The Consumer League, liberal churches, University Buyers' Association, the League for Industrial Democracy and other groups. This 1927 report was signed by Schlink and Chase, but the drafts were in Schlink's handwriting. Included in the proposal were pages of the *Commodity List* that later showed up in the second issue of the List.¹⁵

To fund the "Consumer Foundation," Schlink and Chase turned to the Elmhirst Foundation. The fund's benefactor was the heiress, Dorothy Payne Whitney (1887-1968), who had inherited 15 million dollars from the estate of her father, William C. Whitney, Secretary of the Navy under President Grover Cleveland. She was first married in 1911 to Willard Straight (d. 1918) and married her second husband, Leonard Knight Elmhirst (1893-1974), in 1925.¹⁶ Mrs. Elmhirst, when she was Mrs. Straight, had helped fund the establishment of *The New Republic* with Herbert Croly. Though Mrs. Elmhirst wasn't interested in funding Schlink's expensive "Consumer Foundation," she did provide the Consumers' Club with \$10,000 for clerical and publishing expenses over the next two years.

A report submitted to Mrs. Elmhirst in June 1929 stated that there were 1972 members in the Club. This was up from 542 members in early Fall 1928. The report stated that several thousand membership offers had been mailed to home economists, public school principals, social workers, *New Republic* readers, and members the Consumers' Co-operative Services Inc., but the main source of membership continued to be readers of *Your Money's Worth* and friends of other members. The report noted that reaction to the service from members was encouraging, although members seemed to be "more interested in the idea of the club than in using the service personally..."¹⁷

The report also noted the Club's publications. Schlink had produced two technical reports dealing with "Sunlight--Real and Artificial" and "Cosmetics," and a newsletter dated April 1929. This newsletter starts out by "announcing the possibility that we may go out of existence on June 30." The newsletter also addresses the "low-down" on the Club's recommendations, a list of information services, and information on domestic heating, gasoline, kerosene stoves and fabrics. The newsletter listed the staff of the Club as Schlink, Copeland and Chase.

In September 1929 another revision of the list appeared. This time it was called *Scientific Buying* and appeared in a pocket-size edition that was much more professionally printed than the first two editions.

On December 9, 1929, the Consumers Club Board met to consider changing the name of the Club. In addition the Board discussed whether the Club should advertise in magazines and newspapers, whether local clubs should be encouraged to form, how often a bulletin should be published and how to increase laboratory work.¹⁸ Within the next few weeks the Consumers Club incorporated as Consumers' Research, Inc.

1930-1935

Between 1930 and 1935, Consumers' Research's membership, publications and personnel increased dramatically. By 1935 there were over 50,000 subscribers. Three separate periodicals were published. The *Handbook of Buying* evolved from the original *Commodity List* and was published annually or semi-annually. The *Confidential Bulletin Service* was published bi-monthly and included all of CR's product testing (in-house and consulting laboratories). The *General Bulletin* (non-confidential) was published bi-monthly beginning in 1932 and contained articles on political and consumer oriented issues. Consumers' Research hired between 70 and 100 employees.

¹⁵ "Memorandum For the Establishment of The Consumers Foundation," 1927. CR box 18/13.

¹⁶ "Mrs. Elmhirst Ends Citizenship in U.S.," *New York Times*, 3/26/35. CR box 18/10.

¹⁷ "Report of Experimental Period, Oct, 1928-June 1929." CR box 18/11.

¹⁸ Board of Directors meeting minutes, 1929. CR box 41.

Doing some of its own testing, but relying mostly on other laboratories or experts in specific fields, Consumers' Research went to work exposing the deceit of advertisers, the incompetence of manufacturers and the flaws in capitalism. Early issues of the *Confidential Bulletin Service* included a study of vacuum cleaners, automobiles, alarm clocks, men's underwear, and a condemnation of the advertisers of Lucky Strike cigarettes who stressed that the product was "toasted" when every cigarette brand was to some extent toasted. During this period, CR also reprinted for separate distribution articles and speeches on the education of the consumer, the consumer and food, heating and ventilation, fur coats, cameras, gardening, and health issues and many other political and consumer issues.

Because of Schlink's concern that CR was vulnerable to lawsuits, a decision was made during the 1930 Board meeting to create a legal reserve fund to cover any possible libel charges brought by manufacturers against CR.¹⁹ This was in addition to the confidentiality clauses in a subscribers' membership agreement first set up by CR lawyer Dorothy Kenyon. The confidentiality provisions in the membership application sought to limit CR's liability by claiming that CR's publications were solely for the private use of members and therefore were not so public that they could be deemed libelous. Schlink and M.C. Phillips (his wife and CR editor) tried to make sure anyone who seemed less than an "ultimate consumer" had no access to CR's publications. Therefore advertisers, manufacturers and even librarians were excluded from the subscription lists if they applied for membership under the letterhead of their institution or business, or they listed their profession as one not covered by the membership agreement. When the Library of Congress wrote asking if they could show the magazine to patrons, CR responded that the Library had to keep it behind the reference desk and require users to sign a disclaimer waving their right to sue. There's a *New Yorker* cartoon from the early 1930's with a man in bed trying to conceal his confidential *Bulletin* from his suddenly suspicious wife.²⁰ The membership restrictions were lifted after the 1935 strike, although the confidentiality clause for the annual *Bulletin* remained in effect into the early 1950's.

Consumers' Research began as a liberal/left-leaning organization with directors from magazines, academia, religious groups and the legal profession. Between 1930 and 1935, these Directors included Stuart Chase, Eduard Lindemann of the New School; George Soule of the *New Republic*; Arthur Kellogg, editor of *Social Work*; Bernard Reis, an accountant; Bradford Young and Benson Landis ministers; Donald McConnell, an economist; and Arthur Kallet, Schlink's former co-worker at the American Standards Association and co-author of *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*. Also on the Board of Directors were employees or former employees. These included Schlink, M.C. Phillips, Mathilde Hader, Edith Ayres (Copeland), E.J. Lever (a labor activist and promoter of cooperative buying), J.B. Matthews, Dewey Palmer and Eleanor Loeb.

During the early years, Consumers' Research was located at 47 Charles Street in New York City. When funding came through from the Elmhurst Foundation, offices were set up at 340 West 23rd Street in New York, and later (1932) at 24 West 25th Street. Schlink repeatedly complained about the need to complete his work versus the need to talk to people interested in testing or in the consumer movement. It became apparent to him that a move to a more rural area would give Consumers' Research more laboratory space and better financial viability. A laboratory in the country could become a sort of consumer campus. Schlink had E.J. Lever investigate a bankrupt private school in Morristown, N.J., an artist's colony in Woodstock, N.Y., large estates in Croton and Pawling, N.Y., and land elsewhere. Finally they settled on the Florey Piano Factory in Washington, N.J., a rural town near the Delaware Water Gap and Pennsylvania border in Warren County.²¹ Colston E. Warne, in his lectures, said it was the greatest mistake Schlink ever made.²²

In December 1932 the CR Board of Directors met twice to consider the move from the city. Some at the meetings were interested in the Croton, N.Y., site because it was near New York City. Bernard Reis, CR's treasurer, said that the proper place for CR was outside the City and that lower salaries would be

¹⁹ Board of Directors meeting minutes, 1930. CR box 41.

²⁰ *New Yorker*, Jan. 9, 1937. CR box 84/4.

²¹ Board of Directors meeting minutes, December 5 & 14, 1932. CR box 41.

²² Warne, Colston & Richard L.D. Morse, editor, *The Consumer Movement-Lectures by Colston E. Warne*. Family Economics Trust Press, Manhattan, Kansas, 1993. Page 49.

appropriate. J.B. Matthews, CR board member, "expressed a preference for suicide rather than living in a small town." A committee of staff members expressed the concern that a move to the country would create hardships, but said that Schlink's labor policy at the time was "on the whole fair."²³

Schlink stated many years later that "the borough of Washington charmed many of us from the beginning with its well-painted houses, neat lawns and flowers. We felt that it was a typical U.S. town more representative of the kind of consumer we desired to serve than New York City residents. . . . It was quite a struggle for some of our typical New Yorkers to settle in a small town in a rural area and we had quite a time getting our staff reconstituted, for in time, the city fellers finally, with considerable upheaval, parted company with us."²⁴ In May 1933 CR opened for business in Washington, N.J. Within a year they moved to larger location outside Washington in Bowerstown and stayed until 1983.

While the main concern of CR was to test, rate and compare products, the period between 1930 and 1935 was an era ripe with political and social causes. CR's political activities increased greatly when the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal legislation was passed. Publishing several books and lobbying in Washington, D.C., CR became well-known in business, political, governmental and advertising circles.

The onset of the Depression brought about several more books on consumer issues, many of which were lumped together under the term "Guinea Pig books." This term referred to the title of Schlink and Kallet's bestseller *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs* and to the theory that American consumers were being used as "guinea pigs" by corporations that put profits before customer safety. These books, mostly from Consumers' Research, generated an enormous amount of debate and publicity for CR and the movement. *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs--Dangers in Everyday Food, Drugs and Cosmetics*²⁵ by Kallet and Schlink was published in 1932. It was to become the most popular consumer book of its time by selling an estimated 250,000 copies and far surpassing *Your Money's Worth's* 100,000 copies. With its reliance on scientific data and product horror stories, the book brought many more subscribers to CR and certainly was one of the reasons behind the series of proposed revisions to the 1906 Food and Drug Act. *Skin Deep* by M.C. Phillips²⁶ was the "guinea pig" book on cosmetics. It was the third largest consumer book seller. J.B. Matthews contributed two books partially related to consumer issues and partially related to his wildly fluctuating political ideals. These books were *Partners in Plunder*²⁷ and *Guinea Pigs No More*.²⁸ Schlink wrote another book on foods called *Eat, Drink & Be Wary*,²⁹ while Schlink and Phillips collaborated on a pamphlet on the consumer movement and a proposed Federal Department of the Consumer entitled *Discovering Consumers*.³⁰ Arthur Kallet published another book entitled *Counterfeit*.³¹ Other so-called guinea pig books from non-CR sources included *Our Master's Voice: Advertising* by James Rorty³² and *The Joy of Ignorance*³³ by T. Swann Harding.³⁴

²³ Board of Director Meeting Minutes. December 5 & 14, 1932. CR box 41.

²⁴ CR's 40th Anniversary Talk by F.J. Schlink. History of CR, 1967-1979. CR box 23/10.

²⁵ Kallet, Arthur and F.J. Schlink, *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs--Dangers in Everyday Food, Drugs and Cosmetics*, Vanguard Press, New York, 1932.

²⁶ Phillips, M.C., *Skin Deep--The Truth About Beauty Aids--Safe and Harmful*, Vanguard Press, New York, 1934.

²⁷ Matthews, J.B. and R.E. Shallcross, *Partners in Plunder*, Covvci Freide, New York, 1935.

²⁸ Matthews, J.B. *Guinea Pigs No More*, Covvci Freide, New York, 1936.

²⁹ Schlink, F.J. *Eat, Drink and Be Wary*, Covvci Freide, New York, 1935.

³⁰ Phillips, M.C. and F.J. Schlink, *Discovering Consumers* (John Day Pamphlet # 43). New York, The John Day Company, 1934.

³¹ Kallet, Arthur, *Counterfeit*, Vanguard Press, New York, 1935.

³² Rorty, James, *Our Master's Voice: Advertising*, John Day, New York, 1934.

When the National Recovery Act (NRA) was passed as part of Roosevelt's New Deal, a consumer counsel section (Consumer Advisory Board) was created to see to the needs of consumers. Schlink and CR saw the Counsel as pitifully inadequate. Schlink wrote articles and spoke on the radio against the NRA. Once he attended a meeting of the Consumer Advisory Board that was attended by General Hugh Johnson. The meeting became rowdy and someone suggested Schlink be named to act for consumers on the CAB, but Schlink had left the meeting and did not become involved in the Consumer Advisory Board's realignment.³⁵ An anti-NRA broadcast that Schlink produced was initially censored by CBS radio, but later aired in its entirety.³⁶

Rexford Tugwell, who was a member of Roosevelt's "brain trust," proposed a Food and Drug Act revision in 1933. Some said this was a direct result of Roosevelt's reading *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs* (although Schlink did not believe this--stating that Tugwell had known about such issues since the early days of the Consumer Club). CR closely followed the progress of the food and drug revision for nearly five years. It soon became apparent that Tugwell's bill would be watered down. The bill was re-named for Senator Royal S. Copeland and wasn't passed until 1937. Arthur Kallet, in his role as CR secretary and board member, and as co-author of *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*, went to the Congressional hearings as Consumers' Research's lobbyist. At the hearings Kallet and sometimes Schlink, who joined him, expressed their radical (or non-compromising) views on what food and drug controls were needed. Kallet's language was strident and forceful (even though Schlink and Kallet assumed their ideas would be ignored) and he came close to being ejected from the hearings.³⁷

Business and advertising ridiculed the early consumer movement and Consumers' Research, both directly and through parody. From the reaction to CR's perceived campaigns against advertising and business came Frank Dalton O'Sullivan's diatribe *The Poison Pen of Jersey*.³⁸ Another anti-CR and anti-consumer movement book was *Guinea Pigs and Bugbears* by G.L. Eskew.³⁹ The advertising publications *Printers Ink* and *Tide* often took CR to task. Mainstream periodicals such as *Time* and *Fortune* occasionally were critical of the state of the consumer testing movement. *Time* magazine refused to accept CR's advertisements even after Schlink encouraged CR subscribers to bombard *Time* with letters. *Time* claimed that it was in agreement with the basic ideas behind the consumer movement, but it wouldn't accept advertisements because CR had veered away from mainstream discourse. Schlink claimed, and CR's experience showed, most mainstream publications were afraid to accept ads from CR for fear of offending other advertisers. The more serious articles about Consumers' Research and the consumer movement appeared in various advertising, business or trade journals. These articles, usually, treated Schlink and company either as dangerous people who didn't know what they were talking about, or dismissed the movement with derision and contempt.

One parody of Schlink's work appeared in a 1935 issue of *Variety* under the title "Improbable Broadcasts No. 3--Consumers Research Quarter Hour." The article, which is written as a script, depicts Schlink as delirious when an announcer orders a hamburger. "Hamburger! Do you know what that'll do to your esophagus?" Later, the script has Schlink saying "Onions cause regurgitation."⁴⁰

³³ Harding, T. Swann. *The Joys of Ignorance*, William Godwin, Inc., New York, 1932.

³⁴ Eugene R. Beem: "The Beginnings of the Consumer Movement" in *New Consumerism: Selected Readings* edited by William T. Kelley. Grid Inc., 1973.

³⁵ See CR box 372 and elsewhere.

³⁶ See CR box 537-Radio and TV suppression and elsewhere.

³⁷ Government-FDA Legislation Series. CR boxes 349-165.

³⁸ O'Sullivan, Frank Dalton. *The Poison Pen of Jersey*, The O'Sullivan Publishing House, Chicago. 1936. Upon O'Sullivan's death in the late 1930's, his estate offered ownership of the book to CR. See Administrative Files, CR box 21.

³⁹ Eskew, G.L., *Guinea Pigs and Bugbears*, Research Press, Chicago, 1938.

⁴⁰ "Improbable Broadcasts...", *Variety*, January 15, 1935.

In 1933 the Board consisted of a majority of non-CR employees, but within a year that balance shifted. The move to Washington, New Jersey, made anyone off-site a nuisance at meetings or absent from meetings. In one defining battle, CR treasurer Bernard Reis, after spending significant time on CR's budget, was met with opposition by those who claimed his cost-cutting recommendations were not appropriate for a non-profit organization. He further suggested that some employees have their salaries reduced. This outraged employees and board members both. Upon reading the minutes from a Board meeting in April 1933, Reis was himself outraged to find some of his remarks were not clearly stated. At a May 10, 1933, meeting Reis claimed the previous meeting's minutes had been falsified. Reis said: "I feel that there is being made an attempt to distort the finances of CR and to hide the facts, and I feel that Miss (M.C.) Phillips' feeling is that the organization should be the personal one of Mr. Schlink's and no one else." He also noted "I think that...CR allows maliciousness to disguise facts . . . " and "They are running it [CR] for their own glory. They want to do whatever they please." Also, "I think things have come to a point where Mr. Schlink, Miss Phillips, and Miss [executive secretary, Eleanor] Loeb are going to run the organization any way they see fit." Reis resigned after this meeting.⁴¹

By November 1934, when Dewey Palmer replaced Benson Landis, and M.C. Phillips replaced Arthur Kallet, the Board membership consisted of only one non-employee, Bradford Young. Kallet, travelling out west, was quietly demoted to CR Secretary after having served on the Board since 1930.⁴²

Yet even with this move to employee Board membership, CR, as late as May 1935, seemed determined to move ahead with its progressive activities by proposing a whole series of services beyond the scope of testing products. Proposals included a type of consumer legal association, the formation of a Consumers Party and the continued endorsement of a cabinet level Department of the Consumer.⁴³

STRIKE, 1935

In September 1935 Consumers' Research was fractured by a strike that led to the creation of Consumers' Union and caused a sudden rightward shift in CR's political stance. This shift greatly surprised CR's allies on the left, caused discord in the consumer movement and gratified its enemies in the business and advertising world. Labor strife seemed a direct contradiction to CR's original political ideals. Liberal groups wanted desperately to see the strike resolved amicably.

The Consumers' Research recently-formed employees union requested a meeting with CR's Board of Directors on Friday August 23. Concerns about pay, job security and hard-handed tactics of CR's management were among the reasons a union was formed. Given the circumstances of the era and the activist nature of CR's board and employees, it doesn't seem unusual that a union was formed. On that same Friday, Schlink fired three employees including the union president. Schlink claimed two of the workers had been fired because their six-month contract had ended and the third had been fired because of incompetence. On August 25th Walter Trumbull, a union organizer from Pennsylvania, wrote Arthur Kallet, CR secretary, and Oscar Cox, a lawyer, soon to be nominated to the CR board, to see if they could assist in getting recognition for the union. Trumbull's letter noted the trouble in getting CR to hear the union's demands. Trumbull's letter said that the union regarded the Board's lack of interest in meeting them with "grave uneasiness." This letter was seen by CR board members as constituting blackmail--apparently in the sense that any publicity about labor troubles would blemish CR's name. However, in a letter to the Union, Matthews continued to delay meeting the union.

At a luncheon on August 26th with Oscar Cox, Edie Masters, Frank Palmer and William Mangold, Kallet mentioned Trumbull's letter. All agreed that a strike might cripple CR. Cox gave the Board's point of view.

⁴¹ Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, April 7 & May 10, 1933. Box 41. Reis became treasurer of Consumers Union for 25 years and left that position under strained conditions in the early 1960's.

⁴² Board of Directors meeting minutes, Nov. 22, 1934. CR box 41.

⁴³ Board of Directors meeting minutes, May 2, 1935. CR box 41.

At a Special Board Meeting on August 28th (consisting of Schlink, J.B. Matthews, M.C. Phillips and Dewey Palmer) the union's demands were discussed. Dewey Palmer disagreed that Trumbull's letter constituted blackmail. Palmer was fired. Arthur Kallet was also fired as CR secretary because he had shared the letter with outsiders.

Following the meeting a statement signed by Schlink, Phillips, Matthews and Palmer's replacement, Clark Willever, a local insurance dealer, declared that "members of the union engaged in blackmail in the form of disseminating totally and indisputably false and misleading statements concerning the attitudes, actions and intentions of the Board." The memo ended by stating that "among the worst enemies of trade unionism are those who employ gangster and blackmail tactics."

CR's leaders, Schlink and Phillips (leftists), and Matthews (a socialist surfing near the edge of Communism), felt compelled to resist any attempts to answer employees' complaints because they claimed that the strike was actually an orchestrated attempt by Communists to capture the organization. As proof that the union was orchestrating a Communist-led takeover of CR, it was pointed out that, just as he was fired, Dewey Palmer said that the developments "did not represent any attempt at capture of CR by a Communist or other left-wing group." They also noted Walter Trumbull's past associations. Yet even if they were sincere in their belief that the Union was Communist-led, the impression remains that Schlink, Phillips and Matthews wanted complete control of their organization and had no interest in sharing power with anyone.

On September 4th over 40 CR employees went out on strike. The union called for the reinstatement of the fired workers and Dewey Palmer, protection against discharge based on personal whim, removal of M.C. Phillips and J.B. Matthews from the board, and a minimum salary of \$15 per week. Schlink and the board would not budge. Schlink hired guards and replacement workers. On September 10th, a bus carrying non-striking workers was stopped and stoned on its way to CR. J.B. Matthews, Jr., was beaten. The next night a crowd of 200 strike supporters gathered around CR's buildings. On September 12th over 1000 people attended a meeting at Town Hall in New York City. Speakers included Heywood Broun, Frank Palmer, Dewey Palmer, Abraham Isserman and Arthur Kallet. Several board members' and non-strikers' houses and cars were stoned.

On October 15, after a strike supporter was hit by a stone, a crowd of strikers and strike supporters (local area union members) began to stone CR's buildings. Over 100 window panes were broken and five cars were overturned, while CR employees, constables and Schlink were trapped in the building until nearly midnight. They occasionally fired guns above the heads of the strikers. Finally, those trapped were rescued by local farmers who had been deputized. After the riot, CR sought arrest warrants for 64 people involved in the ruckus and turned down an offer by the Department of Labor to mediate the strike.

As a result of the stone riot several CR strikers including Dewey Palmer were sent to the Warren County jail. Refusing to make bail, they staged a mock trial and food strike to dramatize their dismay at being "railroaded."⁴⁴ Unable to take such dramatics, the sheriff released the strikers on their own recognizance.

About this time a "citizen's committee" made up of several prominent liberals and clergymen led by ACLU head Roger Baldwin, the editor James Waterman Wise and Reinhold Niebuhr began attempts at arbitration. When the Niebuhr and Baldwin report was issued in November, it maintained that the "responsibility rest[ed] chiefly upon the management for aggravating a situation which in the early days it could have cured by accepting some form of mediation or arbitration."

The union brought its complaints of unfair bargaining before the National Labor Relations Board. On December 16 the NLRB hearing was held, presided over by Charles A. Wood. CR attacked the Union for its alleged relationship with the Communist Party and attacked the constitutionality of the laws establishing the NLRB. The union argued that CR refused to acknowledge the union's right to bargain. The NLRB hearings were tense. An attorney for the NLRB came close to "fisticuffs" with CR attorney Edward Garfield over Communist accusations. One female striker told of J.B. Matthews' "long-winded speeches" during early arbitration attempts. Matthews lunged from his table and started to interrupt, but finally stormed out of the hearing. Ultimately, the NLRB found for the union. Its report declared that the CR employees had been fired because of their Union activities and were to be reinstated. CR lost its appeal, but nevertheless ignored the NLRB's ruling. On January 13, 1936, the strike was called off.

⁴⁴ *Newark News*, Oct. 23, 1935. Among newspaper clippings in strike files. CR boxes 422-423.

Within a few days reports noted the formation of a "National Consumers Union" to be headed by Arthur Kallet and Dewey Palmer.

On the surface the 1935 strike was full of irony. It was ironic that a former bastion of liberalism and cutting-edge consumer idealism could turn so aggressively against its employees who were educated, skilled, and very idealistic. CR had a reputation as a mecca for young technicians with progressive ideals. But management and labor relations were never close to ideal. Even when CR was located in New York City, many employees complained bitterly about Schlink. Within a year, most of the New York employees who had moved with CR to Washington, N.J., returned to the City. Though Schlink understood the need for and possibilities of a consumer movement, he was unable to find a way to share power in a movement that could only properly function by taking full advantage of the intellectual firepower available. Schlink, Phillips and Matthews wanted control of their own shop and for this control they traded in any chance of finding the best minds to expand the movement.⁴⁵ What they did settle for, though, was complete control over a smaller organization.

Schlink, essentially the founder of the consumer testing movement, was considered a technically competent engineer, an expert on standards, and a pioneer in product testing, but his political twists, his incapacity to differentiate between the labor movement and Communists, his inability to find a way to share power with competent assistants, led to a rather dramatic fall from influence. Wanting complete control of the organization he created, Schlink saw organized campaigns where relative randomness existed, malignant Communism where social consciousness existed. The new Consumers Union, publishers of *Consumer Reports*, enlisted initial support from many CR subscribers who felt betrayed by CR's labor stance, was able to produce a more attractive magazine, and through direct mail built up a subscriber base that easily overtook CR's circulation.

AFTER THE STRIKE

Consumers' Research's main task was to test products. Despite its political flip-flops and despite the later domination of the field by CU, CR continued to test and rate products. Engineering had always been Schlink's main focus. CR's early testing was sent to laboratories or consultants such as the Electrical Testing Laboratory, Frontier Labs, Foster D. Snell Labs, and many others. After moving to Washington, N.J., in 1933, CR had the space to conduct its own testing of products. Over the next 50 years CR produced hundreds of small machines or gadgets to test how a product held up to stress, the reliability of a product, and if the truth of advertised claims. CR designed machinery, devices and other gadgets to test razor blade sharpness, mattress-life, the durability of socks and other clothing, the fading of fabrics, the reliability of pens or pencils, the viscosity of motor oils, and the strength of iron or lamp cords. Other CR devices were designed to measure a product's wear and tear through tensile tests, shearing tests, abrasion tests, fading tests, hardness tests, compression tests, bending tests, impact tests and other tests. There were tests to measure the quality of linoleum, the cleanliness of dishwasher-washed dishes, and impact resistance in glassware. There were also tests to measure the safety and quality of electric blankets, tests to gauge the quality of steam irons, pressure tests on saucepans, tests on toothbrushes, tests to measure the strength of clothing fabric, tests to measure the durability of lawn mower blades, and tests to note bleeding in fabrics, shrinkage in shirts, and wear in phonograph records. CR also had a physical and chemical laboratory to test the chemical properties of or ingredients in products, and electrical equipment to test household motors, stereos, televisions, radios and many large appliances such as refrigerators, stoves, and dishwashers. Basically, by simulating the extended use of a product and determining the chemical properties of a product, CR was able to come up with recommendations for its subscribers.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See General Files boxes 418-426 for information on the Consumers' Research strike. Also see personnel records in the CR Administrative files and Board of Directors Meeting Minutes (boxes 41-43). Also see personnel files in Consumers Union file (boxes 195-210).

⁴⁶ See Technical Files especially Laboratory Notebooks (CR boxes 780-784) and Testing Agencies and Consultants (CR boxes 873-879).

By assisting in the creation of its competition (CU), CR was doomed in its infancy to relative obscurity, though given its budgetary constraints and technical abilities, they produced an adequate magazine. After the strike CR became a small organization run by a close-knit group of people who wanted little outside influence. The next 50 years, in comparison with the first seven, were relatively quiet (with the exception of CR's red-baiting). Though Schlink and Phillips never shied away from expressing their opinions on any subject, CR's political views were now expressed in the new publication *Consumers Digest* (1937-1942), in the "Off the Editor's Chest" column in the *Bulletin* (1930's-1970's) and in letters to government officials (Congress, the FBI, or the Pentagon), subscribers, and others. Despite claims that CR didn't concern itself with social or political issues, CR constantly collected data on suspected fellow travelers, labor groups and leftist organizations.⁴⁷

CONSUMERS UNION

The Board of Directors of Consumers Union was comprised of many former CR staffers and also former allies of Schlink in the consumer and labor communities. Colston Warne, CU President, had been an early sponsor of CR. A.J. Isserman had defended the CR strikers. John Heasty, James Gilman, Kallet, Dewey H. Palmer, Frank Palmer, Robert Brady and other CU board members all had associations with Schlink and CR. Schlink saw Consumers Union board members as a "transmission belt" for the ideals of the Communist Party. To Schlink, Arthur Kallet's dismissal as CU director in 1957 was not a disagreement with CU's board, but a Communist Party purge. Separate letters in 1942 and 1980 from Schlink describe CU's President, Colston E. Warne, in much the same terms.⁴⁸

Consumers' Research was the main agitator in the effort to suppress Consumers Union. Almost every red-baiting commentary ever written about Consumers Union has Consumers' Research's fingerprints. Consumers' Research was the "research" behind the consumer report J.B. Matthews wrote for the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1939. The report repeated much of the evidence CR had collected over the years about CU director Arthur Kallet. It also detailed past activities of labor organizer Walter Trumbull and CR employee Susan Jenkins, both of whom had little or nothing to do with Consumers Union. Both Don Wharton, author of a 1937 article on Arthur Kallet in *Scribner's*⁴⁹ and Larston D. Farrar, who wrote in 1952 an article in the *Freeman* entitled "Consumers Union: A Red Front," received help from CR.⁵⁰ CR also published and distributed two posters or broadsides entitled "The Company They Keep" and "Let's Look at the Record."⁵¹ About 1960, an editor of the magazine *Ex-Camera* revised his pamphlet "The Scandal of Consumers Union" with material supplied by Schlink. CR also assisted several local American Legion posts in their effort to ban *Consumer Reports* from newsstands and schools. Most anti-CU government reports or testimony generated from J.B. Matthews or others had their origin in CR's files. The endless information CR gathered about CU did not increase because it was new, but because the same information was repeated over and over in different publications or testimony. CR collected data on or targeted several people related in one way or another to CU, including Dexter Masters, Madeline Ross, Harold Aaron, Henry Grundfest, labor leader Ben Gold, writer Malcolm Cowley, Congressman Vito Marcantonio, Michael Quill, Paul Kern, Abraham Isserman, Goodwin Watson, Heywood Broun, Mildred Edie Brady and Robert Brady.

In 1953, after years of intensive lobbying by Colston E. Warne and others, CU was removed from HUAC's list of subversive organizations. Though CU remained on other lists, it was the only organization to be removed from HUAC's list.⁵²

⁴⁷ See "Introduction to Consumers' Research," p. 9. CR box 71/4.

⁴⁸ Warne File in CU series. CR box 199.

⁴⁹ See Arthur Kallet's files in the CU series. CR boxes 196-197. Reference to Wharton's work on the Kallet article is also in the Publicity file, CR box 85.

⁵⁰ CU series. CR box 201.

⁵¹ See files on "communist connections" and the "Red Rope" files. CU series-General Files boxes CR 200-201.

⁵² Consumers Union series. CR boxes 195-210.

On the eve of World War II, the Consumers' Research Board of Directors, despite its vow to stick to the business of the "ultimate consumer," voted to "continue its presence at governmental and consumer meetings to counteract left-wing activities in the interest of national defense and unity of consumer relationships to defense problems."⁵³ It was at this time that CR was presented with another labor problem: several employees, most notably Alice B. Evans (administrative assistant and loyal employee during the strike), had filed for unemployment benefits. Schlink, considering CR an educational organization, fought any attempt to pay unemployment claims. The case ultimately reached the New Jersey Supreme Court, which found, as lower courts had, that CR was bound to unemployment laws like any other organization.⁵⁴ During World War II, much of CR's and CU's testing was undercut by rationing and by the postponement of new models of cars, tires and appliances. CR focused its attention on the bureaucratic methodology of the Office of Price Administration and lobbied for the expulsion of alleged Communists from government service.

In the mid-1940's CR staff members returned to writing books when Schlink and Phillips' *Meat Three Times A Day* and Phillips' sequel on cosmetics, *More Than Skin Deep*, were published.⁵⁵ These books did not generate any notable response. After the war, *Consumer' Research Bulletin* subscription rates reached over 100,000 and with newsstand sales stayed around that number for most of the next three decades.

In the early 1950's the Federal Trade Commission ignored tests that noted the ineffectiveness of an automobile battery additive named AD-X2. Because of political pressure, the head of the Federal Bureau of Standards was fired (though later rehired). CR joined the fray with editorials against the product and its manufacturer, Pioneer, Inc., which promptly brought a lawsuit against CR. The suit was later dismissed.⁵⁶

Issues of importance to the Board in the 1950's were CR's buildings and grounds, subscription promotions, audits, newsstand sales, price increases, and plans for testing products.⁵⁷ Throughout the 1950's, CR's Board of Directors remained fairly stable, including Schlink, Phillips, Reginald Joyce, Clark Willever and Ethel W. Brownell. Staff members also stayed at CR for long periods.

The *Consumers' Research Bulletin* was renamed *Consumers Bulletin* in 1957. This change did not go unnoticed at Consumers Union, as CR's new masthead had a distinct similarity to that of *Consumer Reports*. Colston E. Warne, president of CU, protested. Schlink responded that he didn't see any similarities, and that CR had been around longer than CU.⁵⁸ Also in 1957 Consumers' Research board defined a new policy enabling CR to borrow products for testing from manufacturers as long they were chosen at random.⁵⁹

In 1964, Consumers' Research contracted with Davis Publishing to test various products, including cameras. One result of this was a *Photography Buyers' Guide* published by the Davis division, Science and Mechanics. This contract gave CR access to more products to test, but left CR vulnerable to criticism that they were no longer independent of private industry. Indeed, Consumers Union jumped on CR in an editorial entitled: "CU Notes With Misgivings--Sad Tale of a Consumer Pioneer." The CU editorial questioned CR's claim that "the organization does not have and does not seek support from business or industry." CR replied to its subscribers that there was nothing wrong with the contract and observed that they had notified their subscribers of the contract.⁶⁰

⁵³ Board of Directors meeting minutes, 1941. CR box 41.

⁵⁴ See Administrative Files-Legal Matters. CR boxes 30-31.

⁵⁵ F.J. Schlink and M.C. Phillips' *Meat Three Times A Day*, Richard R. Smith, New York, 1946, and M.C. Phillips, *More Than Skin Deep*, Richard R. Smith, New York, 1948.

⁵⁶ Technical File series on AD-X2 in boxes 836-841. Controversy mentioned elsewhere in collection.

⁵⁷ Board of Directors meeting minutes, 1950's. CR box 41.

⁵⁸ Publications and Production series in CR box 75. Also see Consumers Union file.

⁵⁹ Board of Directors meeting minutes, 1957. CR box 41.

⁶⁰ Consumers Union series. CR box 195.

The late 1960's and early 1970's were difficult for CR. In 1969 Schlink appealed to subscribers to donate money to cover a deficit in the organization's finances. Many subscribers complied and sent along their opinions. One wrote: "I hope you will not have to discontinue, as I value the *Bulletin*, but can't you combine with *Consumer Reports*, which covers practically the same ground?" From another: "Your sad and alarming Club Bul. #102 may be proof that CR may have served its purpose. Is Consumers Union still alive?" A third wrote: "Please, Please continue your good work. We do all our major buying with the assistance of the *Bulletin* --and have for years." And yet another wrote: "I realize that feelings in the 30's were very bitter. But is this really relevant to your problem now? If both organizations (CU & CR) are truly devoted to giving accurate information about consumer products to consumers, as I believe, wouldn't a merger be the best way to accomplish this?" The budget shortfall was corrected and CR continued to publish.⁶¹

At about this time Schlink was singled out by President Nixon in a speech to Congress on consumer issues.⁶² Schlink was honored as a distinguished alumnus by the University of Illinois, made a life fellow by the Franklin Institute and made a fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.⁶³

In 1970 Ruth I. Matthews, J.B.'s third wife and widow, was elected to the board of directors. Clark Willever, the director who had come on just as the strike started, also retired. Also about this time a lawsuit brought by AAMCO was dismissed before trial.⁶⁴ Erma Hinek, longtime CR employee, managing editor and board member died, and was replaced by another longtime employee, Angelita Winkler.⁶⁵ In 1973 the *Consumers Bulletin* was re-named *Consumers' Research Magazine*. Finally, after several years of declining subscriptions, Publishers Clearinghouse was allowed to offer *Consumers' Research Magazine* at a reduced rate in conjunction with its sweepstakes promotion. For years Schlink had rejected any association with Publishers Clearinghouse because he believed that an organization with a sweepstakes indulged in a form of gambling. He relented, however, in view of the emergence of a lottery and other types of gambling in New Jersey. Within a year CR's subscription rates doubled to nearly 150,000 (not including newsstand sales) and CR raised the yearly subscription rate to \$9.00.⁶⁶

At one point in 1970, Schlink received a letter from Walker Sandbach, Director of Consumers Union, discussing a recent meeting with Stuart Chase. Sandbach asked Schlink for a meeting to discuss the early days of the consumer movement. A draft response drawn up indicated a willingness to meet, but the letter was never sent. One copy of Sandbach's letter ended up in a file entitled: "Offers to Run CR/Recent Passes at CR (1970-1974)."⁶⁷

Because of increasing budget problems, Schlink's age and competition from other testing organizations in the early 1980's, CR was sold to conservative radio commentator M. Stanton Evans. Evans moved most of the operations to Washington, D.C. Some technical testing was continued at Washington, New Jersey, until 1983, when CR engineer Reginald Joyce was informed that his services would no longer be needed after 50 years. The magazine no longer tests products, although it continues to include the "Consumers' Observation Post" section and the movie ratings. Many articles are reprints of government reports. *Consumers' Research Magazine* averaged 12,855 subscribers for its monthly issues in 1994.⁶⁸

⁶¹ CR History file. CR box 23.

⁶² Text of Nixon's Consumer speech, *New York Times*, October 31, 1969.

⁶³ See F.J. Schlink's personnel file. CR boxes 44-45.

⁶⁴ See Automobile Engines and Parts series in Technical File boxes 612-613. See also Board of Directors meeting minutes, 1968-1971. Box 41.

⁶⁵ Board of Director meeting minutes, 1970. Administrative File box 41.

⁶⁶ Board of Directors meeting minutes, 1973-1974. CR box 41.

⁶⁷ Walker Sandbach file Consumers Union series, CR box 199. "Offer to Run..." file in Office Management series in CR box 35.

⁶⁸ *Consumers' Research Magazine*, November 1994.