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To Protect & Preserve: Consumer Movement Archives

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TO PROTECT & PRESERVE

We've all heard of businesses that prey on vulnerable consumers: The payday loans with a 40% APR. The robocalls that lure recipients to provide personal information. Dangerous products—cars, food or even toys—that are sold to an uninformed public.

A field of advocacy known as the “consumer movement” emerged during the mid-twentieth century to expose unfair and unsafe business practices like these and to educate citizens.

Richard Morse, a leader in the consumer movement, was a professor and chair of the family economics department at K-State from 1955 through 1987. He spent much of his career advocating for truth-in-savings policies and was appointed to the U.S. Consumer Advisory Council under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

Morse donated his personal papers to K-State Libraries and collaborated with the staff to establish the

Consumer Movement Archives (CMA).

“Richard Morse’s gift laid the foundation for what’s become one of our premier research collections,” Dean Lori Goetsch said. “Many leading consumer advocates and watchdog organizations followed suit with their own donations.”

“THE CONSUMER MOVEMENT IS ABOUT PREVENTING INDUSTRY FROM TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OUR NATION’S CITIZENS AND FAMILIES. WE’RE PROUD TO PRESERVE THAT HISTORY.”

— JANE SCHILLIE, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS CURATOR

Several hundred boxes hold both personal papers of advocates like Morse and organizational records from institutions such as the National Consumer Law Center and the Consumer Federation of America.

TO PROTECT & PRESERVE

CMA Research Award attracts scholars from across the nation



Since 2014, the Consumer Movement Archives Research Award has provided funds for a new generation of scholars to travel to Manhattan.

The 2015 CMA award winner, Mallory SoRelle, came to K-State from Cornell University to conduct research for her dissertation. SoRelle, who will be an assistant professor of American politics at Lafayette College this fall, worked at the National Consumer Law Center right before the financial crisis in 2006.

“People were projecting horrible things for the economy,” SoRelle said. “But no one was listening. A lot of measures said consumers were angry, and even though they were mobilizing for other causes, they weren’t responding the same way to the financial crisis.”

She wanted to know why it was so hard to mobilize consumers around financial issues and how that was related to consumer advocacy groups’ inability to spur reform.

During her visit to Manhattan, she worked intensively with archival records from Americans for Fairness in Lending, an organization that tried

“IT’S NOT EASY TO GET TO MANHATTAN, BUT IT’S ESPECIALLY NOT EASY TO GET THERE FROM ITHACA, NEW YORK. HAVING SUPPORT FROM THE CONSUMER MOVEMENT ARCHIVES RESEARCH AWARD MADE IT POSSIBLE.”

— MALLORY SORELLE

to raise awareness about predatory lending and get people to demand change.

“I argue in my research that most consumers don’t realize that government played an active role in constructing and regulating the system of credit in the U.S., so there’s disconnect when it comes time for them to demand change in how that system works,” SoRelle said. “Unless you make it clear that financial policies change through government action, people don’t understand how they should act to influence policy.”

“The material from the CMA has become an indispensable part of my dissertation.”