TITLE: Traditional Silk Making, Today

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Sericulture is the science of raising silkworms and working with silk. And it encompasses the whole thing from raising the silkworms, raising the cocoons, through the post-cocoon technologies – reeling and twisting and weaving with the silk, embroidering with the silk. And so what I do as a sericulturist – or as a silk worker – is the whole thing. I raise them and breed them for characteristics that I want, and I work with the silk to make finished products.

These are the dried cocoons. I’m going to take these and put them into boiling water. That helps to loosen the gum that holds the cocoons together. Each cocoon is a single unbroken filament, but I have to find it. And that’s what the brush does, it helps me find that end. And whatever you catch, you start to pull, and eventually you get to where there’s one thread coming from each cocoon.

Now that I have all the cocoons with their ends located, I’m ready to start reeling. I’m going to take about fifteen of these and put them into my kettle. Then I’m going to wrap them through this assembly called a “croiseur.” And a croiseur does two things; it squeezes the filaments together, and it dries off some of the water.

I’m hooking the thread up to the winder here.

I’m turning a crank in the back, and every turn of the crank makes the bobbin go around seven times, and the little rocking arm go back four and a half times. And the reason for the rocker arm is that it lays the silk in a crossed pattern so that it doesn’t lay a wet strand on top of a wet strand. It always lays a wet strand on top of a dry strand underneath, and that makes it easier to wind the silk back off.