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Senior Seminar

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America's New Industry?

How Guidebooks Motivated Sericulture in the 19th Century

In 1840, George C. Sibley, a Missouri resident best known for his time as an Indian agent and one of the founders of what is now Lindenwood University, received a letter from his cousin Origen Sibley the contents of which discussed family matters, politics, and lastly a peek into what Origen believed was a budding industry in America¹. The industry in question, silk production. In the letter, Origen opens a hooking discussion about the requirements of silk production, primarily regarding the food supply of the silkworm and the profitability that he estimates will come from it. This is the kind of letter that catches the eye of an individual to engross their interest in a money-making scheme which would require not only the material (the silk) but also the places for which to sell it. This discussion would certainly pique the interest of George Sibley and his wife Mary Easton Sibley, as they would send a letter to Origen that inquired further about how they could also get involved in the silk production industry at their own home. However, the letter they received from Origen in 1841 as a response had a very different tone regarding silk production. "...I am truly glad that you wrote me before engaging in the silk culture, because, although its culture on a mall seale will afford you much gratification, I

¹ Origen Sibley, "Letter from Origen Sibley to George Sibley, January 20, 1840" (1840).

am free to say that I believe now it will yield but little profit, unless a ___ be established in your neighborhood, to which you can dispose of your cocoons as soon as they are gathered.”² The rest of letter details the loss of profitability that Origen faced in his venture with silk production under his own hand, listing countless difficulties and setbacks in detail which set his project to failure. Within the span of one year Origen Sibley had a complete 180 stance on him getting involved in sericulture. Essentially, what these two letters represent is the entire history of the silk production industry in the United States during the 19th century, i.e., it was a complete failure. However, there are essential things in these two letters regarding sericulture and the spread of information about it. Origen Sibley could hardly have been the only person who was swayed by information regarding creating silk production an industry in the United States. How did he come across this information regarding sericulture? How was the information spread? How was he and the rest of the Sibley’s motivated to take on this endeavor only for it to end in failure? These lines of questions after looking over these letters is what prompted a closer look at the motivations of those promoting sericulture and how they motivated others to get involved as well.

Silk production as a United States industry was entering a new wave of popularity during the 19th century. Silk has always been known as a luxury commodity, something which demonstrated wealth and prestige. Thus, harnessing its production would demonstrate American entrepreneurship and their ability to monopolize goods, but it also would symbolize the United States and those who partake in the industry as elite and wealthy. With these overarching goals of sericulture (silk culture) those involved in the movement wanted to create a nationwide industry and in order to do this they would create their own guides and pamphlets that would

² Origen Sibley, "Letter to Mary Sibley from Origen Sibley, February 24, 1841" (1841).

teach people the basics of silk production. Despite knowing that sericulture had never prospered on a large and profitable scale these guidebooks were published constantly in the 19th century, indicating that the idea of sericulture in the United States was at least being read about and discussed thoroughly. Each author provided their own motivations as to why people should be interested in getting involved in sericulture. Therefore, this paper's objective is to examine the motivations of authors of silk guidebooks; particularly how they utilized various literary hooks and techniques to encourage viewership of their material and to get more people involved in sericulture.

When looking at the works of historians that discuss silk culture in the 19th century and its general global history, Ben Marsh has been the foremost expert and prolific author of a number of different articles and books regarding the topic. In his book and one of his more recent contributions, *Unraveled Dreams: Silk and the Atlantic World 1500-1840*, he first discusses in his introduction the history of sericulture back to its conceived beginnings in the 6th century BCE in what is today China, and then he expands on the overarching history of silk on the global scale.³ This includes how silk traveled as a commodity from its Asian roots to the Middle East, then to Europe, and so on. Essentially noting the attempts at controlling silk trade and production over time. Other works by Marsh on the subject of silk culture focus more on the industry in the United States, primarily during the colonial period to the 19th century, and which jump from various states and regions⁴. Thus, providing the earlier known aspects of sericulture attempts that

³ Ben Marsh, *Unraveled Dreams: Silk and the Atlantic World 1500-1840*, pgs. 9-12.

⁴ Ben Marsh, “‘One Man Might Bring it to Perfection’: Rev. Ezra Stiles and the Quest for New England Silk.”

Ben Marsh, “Silk Hopes in Colonial South Carolina.”

would help define future attempts. In his article, “The Republics New Clothes: Making Silk in the Antebellum United States” he discusses the system that was in place to spur the spread of sericulture in the United States, this included agricultural journals, the press, agricultural societies, and post offices.⁵ This article in particular was insightful on providing the context of the silk industry in the United States during the 19th century and does touch on some of the motivations/responses of those propagating the industry, however, the article remains broad and encompasses a great deal of sericulture within the allotted period. Other historians have looked at silk and its symbolic place in an emerging global economy. Silk had been a luxury article and textile that was almost exclusively utilized by the upper classes throughout history. While Marsh examines this as well in his book *Unravelling Dreams*, it can also be seen in context in Zara Anishanslin’s book *Portrait of a Woman in Silk: Hidden Histories of the British Atlantic World*. In this book Anishanslin traces the physical portrait of a woman wearing silk all the way from the person who patroned the creation of the painting to the person who procured the silk to make the pattern for the dress that was made of silk in the image.⁶ What this examination does for the history of sericulture is establish its social importance a century prior to the 19th century, providing the context for which silk would be so important a commodity in the global economy.

Before understanding the motivations of the author of guidebooks there needs to be a little more context for what the contents of the guidebooks were meant to portray. Those involved in sericulture and who were part of the movement to create an industry for the luxury commodity needed to simplify the process and make the information more accessible. This is

⁵ Ben Marsh, “The Republics New Clothes: Making Silk in the Antebellum United States.”

⁶ Zara Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk: Hidden Histories of the British Atlantic World*.

where guidebooks and pamphlets came in. They would essentially be light reading material which had all the necessary information that someone needed if they were to one day take on sericulture for themselves. This was not a new phenomenon in the 19th century, in fact, guides on how to raise sericulture go back to its earliest documented history in ancient Chinese stories and writings.⁷ The information within 19th century guidebooks were all very similar to one another in the long run. Each would instruct on the different types of silkworms on the market, where to get them, the types of food sources that were acceptable, how to rear and breed silkworms, how to utilize their cocoons, and how to spin the cocoons into usable articles, just to briefly summarize. The information in these guidebooks could be quite extensive, in William Kenrick's, "The American silk grower's guide: or, The art of raising the mulberry and silk, and the system of successive crops in each season" there were 49 sections of detailed information on sericulture, 18 of those sections having to do with just mulberry trees and leaves (Mulberry trees being the ideal food source for silkworms)⁸. However, the information in the guidebooks which has more semblance of individuality to them is found in the introductions and the prefaces. These sections of the documents are reflections of the authors bias and perspectives on sericulture and thus provide the motivations for 19th century Americans to get themselves involved in an industry that had never taken off in or prior in the nation's history.

Luxury Commodity

⁷ Ben Marsh, *Unraveled Dreams: Silk and the Atlantic World 1500-1840*, pgs. 9-12.

⁸ William Kenrick, "The American silk grower's guide: or, The art of raising the mulberry and silk, and the system of successive crops in each season", 1839, pgs. 3-4 (index), 26-56 (sections).

As has been mentioned already, silk was a luxury commodity that was highly sought after and heavily utilized by the upper classes within society. It had been an article that had been traded from areas that are today China, to India, to the Middle East, and eventually into the European territories⁹. It was the article of the aristocracy, a symbol of wealth before the 19th century, but that symbolism remained in the minds of the western world. That symbolic value that silk had was another way in which the authors of guidebooks would encourage readers to take on sericulture for themselves. Silk by itself was symbolic of wealth, but affording to fashion that silk material into something usable or wearable was where the importance truly laid. If people were able to produce silk in the United States in their own homes, they would be able to participate and have much easier access to an article/textile which had for centuries been only accessible by nobility. But in a newly formed country with no nobility and only those who could create their own fortunes the idea of everyone being seen as someone luxurious enough to be draped in silk would double as being seen as someone of status. There are two main Empires that the guidebooks mention when discussing sericulture during the 19th century, those being France and Italy, the two trendsetters of the fashion industry more generally. These two empires had the time and money to work with silk and establish themselves as the elite silk curators. This was done by keeping their skills and techniques to themselves and through the fine quality of the silk that they were producing when compared to other silk producers in the world.¹⁰ In essence,

⁹ William Kenrick, "The American silk grower's guide: or, The art of raising the mulberry and silk, and the system of successive crops in each season", 1839, pgs. 7-8.

Ben Marsh, *Unraveled Dreams: Silk and the Atlantic World 1500-1840*, pgs. 9-12.

¹⁰ William Kenrick, "The American silk grower's guide: or, The art of raising the mulberry and silk, and the system of successive crops in each season", 1839, pgs. 7-8.

everyone wanted their silk to be on par or better than the silk produced by these empires because then that would shift the markets and provide more financial incentive in the United States.

Monetary Gain

Having silk as a luxury textile was the entry point for many to want to invest their time, energy and money into sericulture, but beyond having it for oneself there was the incentive for more. More would come in the shape of monetary gain. Silk after all was an investment which had the potential to make people money, this would be another way in which authors would encourage their readers to get involved in the industry. As seen in the Sibley letters profitability of silk was a huge contender for why people wanted to participate in silk, there was an established demand for silk.

The sericulture movement was a way for people to formulate their own businesses and create a significant profit, or at least that was the goal. If the European markets could do it and monopolize on the industry, then American entrepreneurs wanted to give it a try as well. The best way to muscle their way into the business aspects of sericulture, which again sought to get the average American involved in their own silk culture at home, was to establish places where they could acquire the necessities to get the ball rolling. In hindsight, the establishment of businesses like this designed to make money off of getting other people involved or buying into sericulture seems more like a scam. This can be seen when going over the guidebooks like Carl Strack's, "'America's new industry," silk growing. A complete manual of instructions for silk growers" and looking at the publishing company that printed the guide, it comes from a Le Salle Illinois company¹¹. In the guide this town is specifically mentioned as one of the places where a

¹¹ Carl Strack, "'America's new industry," silk growing. A complete manual of instructions for silk growers" 1886.

person looking to get into sericulture should go to procure worms. That is because Le Salle was a distributing point for the eggs of silkworms that would be needed for a person's sericulture endeavors to thrive. In terms of motives for printing this document, the motive lies with the financial benefits that the company would stand to gain by selling silkworm eggs. This idea is also seen in the Pennsylvania Society on Silk's "Directions for the Rearing of Silk Worms, and the Culture of the White Mulberry Tree" guidebook. Here the guidebook is instead printed by a group of people who have created their own onset organization that sells worms, mulberry tree starters, and already formed cocoons that they have raised to those who may be interested. This can be seen in the "Premiums" of the guide, in which it goes on to list the pricing for each item that the society had produced.¹² Thus, the more people decide that they want to get involved in sericulture the more opportunity that this organization of silk growers will have had to earn some money off their sericulture and silk related items. So, guidebooks could also be ways of advertising localized businesses of sericulture while simultaneously getting more people involved and educated on starting their own worm farms.

Monetary influence was something that guidebook authors also had to take into account when addressing their audiences. As mentioned above with the Pennsylvania Society on Silk they had the very first section dedicated to their own pricings for the necessities of sericulture such as worms they had raised, mulberry tree starters, cocoons, as well as the guidebook itself. In another guidebook written by Annie C. Parham she took into account instead that with the difficulties in place with sericulture as it is those just starting out shouldn't need to worry about throwing all of their money into a guidebook. Instead, she indicated in her preface that she

¹² Pennsylvania Society on Silk, "Directions for the Rearing of Silk Worms, and the Culture of the White Mulberry Tree" (1828), pg. 4.

worked to make her own guide as available as possible for those who were not as well off but still wanted to try their hand at sericulture.¹³ This also indicated that sericulture as business or operation to make money was something that more than one group of people were interested in getting involved in. It wasn't something that just wealthy individuals wanted to try their hand at to make money on top of what they were already doing, but the average working person could partake as well. This influx of people wanting to partake in sericulture but needing some guidance that was not biased or which was more general in its information brought about the US Department of Agriculture Bureau of Entomology to create their own guides for public consumption. This 1888 bulletin that the US Department of Agriculture put out included two prefaces, one from the second edition and from this edition (the sixth edition). The second edition was written in 1882 and provided just general information on sericulture without going overboard or info-dumping so as to overwhelm the reader who was just starting out. However, with this 1888 edition the bulletin provides in the preface that this newer edition, based on demand, will include more information regarding things such as, "...diseases, reproduction, reeling, and the physical properties of raw silk..." and even discussing the various machineries' that have evolved in the time between editions that could prove useful to sericulturists.¹⁴ With this in mind it is not difficult to see how sericulture was taking over people's minds and becoming this new industry in America. Enough people were getting their hands on guides and requesting the federal government to assist them in establishing reputable information as well as

¹³ Annie C. Parham, "What a Woman Knows about Silk Culture: A Practical Book of Instruction Founded on Experience" (1882), pg. 3.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture Bureau of Entomology. "The Mulberry Silkworm; Being a Manual of Instructions in Silk-Culture" (1888), pg. 1-3, 5-6.

a federally recognized industry, allowing for even more people to have access to sericulture as source of revenue.

Nationalism

One of the most notable motivations that contributed to the trend was the authors of these guidebooks ability to relate sericulture to ideas of nationalism or American exceptionalism. These authors were all trying to get as many people involved in sericulture as they possibly could in order to make money and monopolize on the industry, and in doing so they needed to apply a hook that would get people more interested in what they had to say compared to any other guidebook that was available. Thus, the key to hooking readers was to apply and instill an idea that American industry was inherently better than it is anywhere else in the world, because of course it is. Or at least authors hoped that that was the way readers would think about it.

One of the ways that the authors would bring out feelings of national pride which came up a number of times in the guidebooks was through discussions of the environment, or more accurately, discussions of how the American landscape was the perfect grounds and weather for implementing silk production. In William Kenrick's "The American silk grower's guide: or, The art of raising the mulberry and silk, and the system of successive crops in each season" he states, "It is a system particularly adapted to our own highly favored climate - to our more serene atmosphere, and almost perpetuated sunshine during summer, and to the particular requirements of our people", what this section is doing is painting the environment as better for nurturing silkworms and almost insinuating an air of hyper-importance of the American person or their character.¹⁵ Both points are a little strange regarding this discussion. First addressing the part

¹⁵ William Kenrick, "The American silk grower's guide: or, The art of raising the mulberry and silk, and the system of successive crops in each season", 1839, pg. 5.

about the environment, while this was noted a number of times in the guidebooks it leaves out some of the regional areas that would be most suitable for sericulture. There are certain areas in the United States that have far too extreme of temperatures to successfully rear silkworms, but this particular quote does not indicate the large variety of climates and environments in the United States and instead speaks to them all as being suitable for sericulture. But the quote brings out in the reader a sense that the land in which they live, that being in the United States, was a universally adaptable soil. Using phrases such as “highly favored” and “more serene atmosphere” indicates that sense of superiority over something or somewhere else. It also manages to tie in the reader and United States citizens into this idea of superiority by linking them to that ultra-idealistic land. Essentially implying that it is the people of the United States that are able to have a handle on the land and the environment which is fruitful to them.

The emphasis on the environment was only one way that nationalism was utilized to get people hooked, indicating how individuals were also part of the American exceptionalism experience in industry was also important to note. Further on in the preface Kenrick continues by saying, “The decisive impulse is already given – already are its mighty influences extending throughout our country, far and wide. The Americans are awake! Hope dawns auspicious – the day and its brightness will be ours. Endowed, as are our people, with fortitude, with energy, and with intellectual resources unsurpassed – is there one American who can doubt?”¹⁶ In some ways it is hard to believe a speech like this is being written about silk production becoming an industry in the United States. But this kind of language use was one of the ways to hook a reader's interest

¹⁶ William Kenrick, “The American silk grower's guide: or, The art of raising the mulberry and silk, and the system of successive crops in each season”, 1839, pg. 6.

in not only sericulture but also the guide. Kenrick utilizes the American exceptionalism trope in his work very effectively in not just the way he implies the excellent conditions that the land and weather needed to pursue sericulture but also in how he incorporates the reader (his implied American audience) into that exceptionalism. If an author is putting so much emphasis on the greatness of America, its land, weather, and people it would be more difficult for a reader to simply ignore or look past it. If it truly is so simple a task, that also has monetary benefits, then why would any random American citizen not want to take the gamble?

The idea of establishing sericulture in the United States was such a big idea that people from outside of the United States were brought in to give lectures over it and to create works that would help create a baseline of information which would help get people moving in the right direction. Herman Roche in his “The American Silk Raiser” for example, he brought with him his knowledge of French sericulture tactics and constructed his own guide on the subject. So, despite the drive to create an industry in the United States with sericulture, there were still aspects of the “old world” that had sway on what was important. In the previous examples, it was discussed that the United States wanted to specifically set itself apart from this idea of the old world or the European empires, not just in way of thinking or how they went about rearing silkworms, they also wanted to set themselves apart by silk quality. But as can be seen with Roche’s example other nations were much better off in the industry than the United States were in the 19th century, his primary focus being on the French System. So much, if not all, of the information that was being passed around was directly linked to what had already been written by sericulturists in Europe and beyond, the United States only needed to adapt itself as the industrialists of France had done. In his introduction he discusses that the French are a people built for industry because they are endowed with prosperity, thus, of course they would be able

to take control over an industry such as silk¹⁷. Note that this is a similar mindset seen in other guides that have already been examined but in reference to the American people. So, this idea of building up the people to believe that they have some superiority over other empires and people is not just an American exceptionalism trope, but the trope of nationalism also works for other empires and their sericulture ventures as well. What this does then is compare the French and the Americans, however, rather than pitting the two against each other it puts them in the same category. Both the American and French here are depicted as inherently superior in intelligence, they have the environment to work with, the finances to work with, and such that has been examined as tools of national propaganda for sericulture.

This focus on nationalism in sericulture as they are reflected in the guidebooks that people were consuming were not necessarily a good thing for the fledgling industry. While the guidebooks were certainly getting people involved in sericulture and providing information that could be useful, it provides a false sense of security to those dazzled by the American exceptionalism. In Doctor T. J. Burrill's "Experiments in Silk-Culture, Report to the Board of Trustees, September, 1884, By T. J. Burrill, PH. D., Professor of Botany and Horticulture." He brings up that the focus on nationalism in guidebooks and sericulture circles has much to do with the failure of the industry based on the results of his silk experiments. In his experiments he followed various guidebooks and their information regarding foods, rearing's, environments, and weather exposure. But he noted that a number of his worms were becoming diseased. Something which he notes that the guidebooks say is a problem of "the old world" and negligence, both of which were not present in his experiment. He writes,

¹⁷ Herman Rocke, "The "American silk raiser"; a complete instruction on silk culture", (1882), pg. 6-7.

Our experiments do not appear to have been aware of the fact - if it exists - that the disastrously destructive diseases so well known and so much dreaded in the Old World also affect the worms raised in the United States. They have known, it is true, that the worm sometimes died in numbers, and doubtless of instances where the loss was total, as in our case; but the trouble has laid two defective food, bad ventilation, unfavorable temperature at critical periods of development, want of cleanliness, etc., rather than to any contagion, the virus of which multiplied and spread like that of measles and smallpox among human beings. Indeed, until recently the subject of diseases of insects of any kind except from insect parasites, has received no attention in America.¹⁸

What can be gathered from this quote is that silk guidebooks and their usage of national pride was blinding and inhibiting the actual production of silk on the scale of industry from taking off. With the guidebooks indicating that disease to the silkworm is not something to worry about in their contents and that it is only something that the “Old World” or rather the European and Asian countries needed to worry about, thus, they are implying that these concerns could not happen in the United States. Dr. Burrill’s takeaways from the experiment is that with people taking on sericulture more and more during this time there would need to be more focus on experiments and observations with the actual food sources that were being pushed and the life cycles and genetic makeup of silkworms. This kind of scientific focus would only be able to aid in further production of a silk industry.

Dr. Burrill was hardly the only person to take note of aspects of concern regarding sericulture in the United States because of these guidebooks and how they were making

¹⁸ T. J. Burrill, “Experiments in Silk-Culture, Report to the Board of Trustees, September, 1884, By T. J. Burrill, PH. D., Professor of Botany and Horticulture,” (1884), pg. 89.

sericulture out to be simple tasks for the American people. The US Department of Agriculture had taken notice of this shift and after numerous requests they did their own research on sericulture and examined existing guides in order to formulate their own for public consumption. The prefaces for this bulletin starts by listing off some of the concerns that the Federal government has with sericulture as it has risen in popularity. One of the main concerns that it brings up is that guidebooks indicate that sericulture is something anyone can take up and have it be a profitable venture outright. In order to cover themselves from liability they cannot say that this is a true statement. Certainly, anyone who is able can train themselves with these guides to care for silkworms. They provide the bare essential information on the best times to raise them, the weather they would be best cared for in, what to feed them, how long it takes to raise them, dissecting which parts of the cocoons will be of use or profitable, and so much more. However, what the guidebooks leave out is that in order to make a significant profit in sericulture you would require a very large amount of worms, food, supplies, and workers. The guides mostly indicate small scale operations that people can undergo at their own homes on their own time, but this will only produce enough cocoons that will be of value for small items or items for one article of silk textile. That is only discussing the cocoons themselves though, the actual process of taking the cocoon of the silkworm and turning it into useable silk is one that requires specific tools and training that simple guides cannot provide. Other empires in the world had perfected their techniques in sericulture rearing and spinning that American's just did not have access to unless skilled workers were imported into the country or they were taught by said skilled workers.¹⁹ This information that has been discussed thus far about how great the American

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture Bureau of Entomology. "The Mulberry Silkworm; Being a Manual of Instructions in Silk-Culture" (1888), pgs. 1-3.

environment, weather, and people are when it comes to sericulture was, from the perspective of the federal government on the matter only indicated a false view for people wanting to get involved and make profits. These concerns that were brought up however were things that could be alleviated over time with the right amount of dedication and American drive. This can be seen in the preface when the author closes their position by bolstering that American exceptionalism “...another is the greater average intelligence and ingenuity of our people, who will not be content to tread merely in the ways of the Old World, but will be quick to improve on their methods...”²⁰ So again, there is that American exceptionalism trope being used to influence those who are reading up on sericulture, and despite some of the setbacks that this guide from the Department of Agriculture has thus far indicated there is still in their eyes a chance that it could take off. While the trope has been shown to have its setbacks and flaws because it provides a glorified mindset of what sericulture can accurately produce, it clearly is still going to be used as a tactic to keep people interested and assist in the American economy. As mentioned in an above section, the more people are buying into sericulture the more money gets produced as a result in the United States, and where money is to be made more focus and importance will be put on it by academics, the government, and the greater society.

Foreign Importation

Another method that will be examined from these guidebooks is the issue of importation of goods and how that effected the American economy. It should be noted that the United States was still developing and did not necessarily have the same kinds of trade deals and home-grown

²⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture Bureau of Entomology. “The Mulberry Silkworm; Being a Manual of Instructions in Silk-Culture” (1888), pg. 3.

industries that other countries in the 19th century had. As has been mentioned the United States did not have an established industry with silk, that was the reason for these kinds of guidebooks to be produced. However, other countries had had time to develop and establish their own industries in silk production and trade. Without that home grown industry, the United States relied on the importation of silk from these other countries.

The reason for the focus on national pride comes with the importance of importation of silk into the United States. Kenrick notes that the US spent \$22,862,177 on importation of silk in 1836, which was more than was seen in previous years as silk became a much more common commodity.²¹ So, the drive for silk production industry in the United States also has its motivations in competing with foreign empires monopolies on the silk markets. It should be noted that this was an issue for a number of empires during this time as well. This can also be seen in how the public gets the federal and local government to assist them in creating an industry for silk production. This was first seen in the aforementioned guide that the U.S. Department of Agriculture Bureau of Entomology posted information to the public about sericulture over the years of its growth in popularity. But this was hardly the first time that members of the government would assist in sericulture guidance, another example of this can be seen in the Richard Rush letter lengthily and adequately titled, “Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting the information required by a resolution of the House of Representatives, of May, 1826, in relation to the growth and manufacture of silk, adapted to the different parts of the Union.” In this instance this inquiry was positing on whether or not legislative action was needed in aiding in the production of silk. This letter was the answer to the inquiry on that topic,

²¹ William Kenrick, “The American silk grower's guide: or, The art of raising the mulberry and silk, and the system of successive crops in each season”, 1839, pg. 5.

the author of which was tasked with researching aspects of sericulture such as the needs of vegetation (or the types of mulberry tree that could be used), how to raise the silk worm, as well as the general importance of silk and its production (so why people were interested in silk to begin with). The letter of report then goes on to discuss the history of silk production in the United States history and gathering data on pricing of imports and exports on silk and related items for it. It was the position of Rush that sericulture was indeed a worthwhile venture to get involved in, if only for the sake of halting the amount of money that was being spent on importing silk goods. His demonstration to prove his point was to show the amount of money that was spent in a given year on importing and exporting silk and put it in a chart to show how much was spent on silk over time (years ranging from 1821-1825). The results demonstrated that the cost of importing silk was increasing each year as use of silk became more popular and in the 5 years that were listed there was \$35,156,494 spent on importing silk while only \$7,968,011 was spent on exporting silk.²² What this shows is that drastic increase in the desire for people to own silk but also demonstrated what the United States was missing out on in terms of financial gain that was to be had on these monopolies of industry. With that in mind the following pages in this document consists of manual instructions on how to raise silkworms. Indicating that even those in the federal government very clearly saw what Rush was laying out before them, that the United States was lacking in the silk department and if they wanted to keep up with the rest of the western world on this industry of silk (and the financial benefits that came with it) then they would need to create such a guide for themselves to gather further support in the sericulture movement during this time.

²² Richard Rush, "Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting the information required by a resolution of the House of Representatives, of May, 1826, in relation to the growth and manufacture of silk, adapted to the different parts of the Union.", (1828), pgs. 4-6.

The guidebooks were not only painting out nationalism by indicating the amount of money that could be made from the venture when compared to other empires, some were very clearly pitting the United States against other empires. As has been shown the guides wanted readers to see how being an American and living in the United States was inherently going to make sericulture a good investment of time, money, and energy, but it does not necessarily outright pit empires against the United States. However in the Women's Silk Culture Association of the United States second annual report they provide comparison to other countries which produce silk for the rest of the western world, one section reads, "The quality of these cocoons was, after examination by experts, pronounced very fine, and later experiments of reeling from these 21 lots, proved the American raised silk equal, if not superior to the best classic silk of Italy. It has been freely tested in several modes of manufacture, guide and woven into various kinds of handkerchiefs, and also into elegant brocade silk dress pattern."²³ Essentially what they are doing here is creating a mental picture of the United States versus the rest of the world where silk is being produced. Places like Italy had been partaking in sericulture for centuries at this point and were going to have one of the largest export markets for silk, thus it was important for a budding industry to establish that the silk that they were making was going to be just as good if not better than some of these well-known and elite silk producers. If readers see that they are going to be getting a finer material from their own work they will be more inclined to try their hand with sericulture, because again, silk is a luxury item symbolic of wealth and prestige. Should the United States create a silk that equates to the silk of sericulturists in European countries like France and Italy it would be a huge financial success for those living in the United

²³ Women's Silk Culture Association of the United States. "Annual Report of the Women's Silk Culture Association of the United States (Volume 2)." (1882), pg. 6.

States because they would be able to shake up the preexisting monopolies on the industry and insert themselves in that global market.

Informed

The final and likely most important mode of getting people on board with their version of sericulture guidance was to make sure that they came off as knowing what they were talking about. This might seem obvious to the reader, but it still holds a great deal of importance, especially as information regarding the needs of silkworms changed or new ideas began to emerge, some of which contradicted one another. Essentially, the authors of guidebooks had to establish that they were presenting information which would work as they had proven by doing it themselves, but which also stood out enough to a reader who could get the same information in any other guidebook.

In Annie C. Parham's guidebook, she is quick to establish her trustworthiness to the reader which also works to set her apart from other silk guidebook authors, she writes, "I do not propose to say that I have gained my information from "reliable authorities," (as others do say), but what I hear right is the result of actual experience, right here in our own southern climate. I should not offer my instructions to the public, except for the fact that by following them, I have been successful in raising silk."²⁴ Here she indicates that she has been working on her own sericulture experiments which she has deemed fruitful enough to share her successes with others. Carl Strack similarly opens his preface by indicating to the audience that:

²⁴ Annie C. Parham, "What a Woman Knows about Silk Culture: A Practical Book of Instruction Founded on Experience" (1882), pg. 3.

...while the author does not parade this work as one entirely original, yet he does issue the same with the firm conviction that many of the ideas and instructions advanced, are the results of his own practical experience and observance, and are therefore of much more value in the end, than those given by authors, who (as one very recently admitted to me) 'never raised or even owned a worm in their life'.²⁵

So, in both cases the authors indicate and are transparent that what they are presenting in their guidebooks is information that is not necessarily new or entirely special compared with other guidebooks. Both also indicate something important; they more or less throw other guidebook authors under the bus, or at least indicate doubts in their validity when compared to their own. This method of building themselves up in the eyes of the reader and making their word and actions mean something while comparing their work to others allows them to stand out when they know the information that they are presenting is nothing new in the field of sericulture. In Strack's case he mentions a "specific" person who has authored a guidebook but who in confidence told him that what they had written was not something they could personally contest to as they had never actually raised silkworms. He does this but does not mention who the other person and guidebook is to the reader. One way of interpreting this is that this was just a ploy used to compare his own guide and make it look more reputable to the reader.

Other authors of guidebooks don't necessarily indicate their trustworthiness and informative position by stating it outright, which was shown in the previous examples. For others there is a more subtle approach which is utilized but maintains effectiveness in getting readers to

²⁵ Carl Strack, "'America's new industry,' silk growing. A complete manual of instructions for silk growers" 1886, pg. 3.

understand, and that is in being as upfront as possible to the reader about the intentions of the author. An example of this can be found in John D'Homergue's guide on silk production, in which he declares that the information that he is presenting is not new or original in its practice. His preface indicates, "Agriculture and all parts of husbandry have long been arts of common practice, and yet will be subjects proper to be treated of , so long as they are capable of improvement; and even though they were not capable of being further improved, yet, it would necessary to make public what was already known, that persons who have not the opportunity of being instructed, might be encouraged to begin their journey..."²⁶ D'Homergue is upfront that the information is not anything new in the field of agriculture or sericulture alike. Instead, he declares that while his information is not new, it is no less important to the grand scheme of sericulture. By creating more guides for people who are interested, regardless of the diversity of the content within them, it is getting the word out to the masses on what sericulture is, how to get involved, and the messages that are slipped into each guide about why it may be of importance to get involved. For D'Homergue the teaching of others and keeping the tradition of sericulture alive was his drive for creating this guide, and as has been demonstrated in the entirety of this paper there has been numerous drives and motivations which guides have utilized to get more people involved in a movement, they were so passionate about and invested in. All of those guides shared with D'Homergue the tradition of passing their sericulture motivations and the shared information to future sericulturists in their own attempt to establish a larger American industry of silk production.

²⁶ John D'Homergue, "The Silk Culturist's Manual: Or A Popular Treatise on the Planting and Cultivation of Mulberry Trees, the Rearing and Propagating of Silk Worms, and the Preparation of the Raw Material for Exportation: Addressed to the Farmers and Planters of the United States." (1839) pgs. 3-4.

One of the things that historians and authors of sericulture guidebooks have in common in how they write about the topic is that they put great, almost biblical emphasis on the silkworm in the creation of silk and thus the global industry that would take over the world for much of history. To some extent that is true, but in some ways the worm only plays a small role in industry. Based on the examination of these guidebooks, silk production fell into the hands of people who each had their own motivations and ideas on silk. The silkworm has no need for silk outside of its phase of metamorphosis. It is the desires and assigned meaning of silk which people recognized and wanted to be able to replicate. With the desire for easier access to silk as well as the symbolic and financial implications of harnessing sericulture there was enough drive to attempt to create an industry. With the use of guidebooks, each with their own implicit motivation's, sericulture had a brief but drastic grip on society in the United States. Despite its failure to stick, it demonstrated the ways in which people propagandized budding industries.

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