Japan was the world’s leading exporter of silk for nearly half a century and changed silk from a product only the rich could afford to one enjoyed by the middle class. However, the Japanese silk industry suffered greatly when more affordable synthetic fibers—such as nylon—were introduced in the 1930s. Conditions worsened when trade with the United States ceased during World War II. In the postwar period, the demand for Japanese silk steadily declined, forcing silkworm farmers and reeling factories in Japan to shut down. This includes the Tomioka Silk Mill, which finally ceased operation in 1987. There are about three hundred households across Japan that still raise silkworms, and their silk is processed at two reeling factories. One of these is Usuiseishi Co., Ltd. about 20 kilometers from Tomioka in the city of Annaka. First founded as the Usui Raw Silk Manufacturing Agricultural Cooperative Association in 1959, Usuiseishi has become important to the maintenance of silk production in Japan. While the area is no longer known for silk production, this factory still takes in many of the cocoons produced around Japan for processing into silk.