

Mount Union Post Office

35 West Market Street
Mount Union, PA 17066

MURAL

Title: *The Union of the Mountains*

Artist: Paul Rohland

Date: 1937

Medium: Oil on canvas



From the late 1800s and for most of the 20th century, the mountains near Mount Union provided the quartzite and ganister rock used to make the town's most important product: silica brick. These bricks were used in paving and to line steel furnaces and coke ovens. At one time three brick refractories operated in town producing 80,000 to 100,000 bricks a day, seven days a week. Mount Union was known as the "Silica Brick Capital of the World."

But artist Paul Rohland rejected Mount Union's industry as a mural subject, writing that he "was not particularly interested in industrial turmoil as a decorative idea." Instead he chose to paint a landscape, the two mountains that inspired the town's name. Nevertheless, a number of interesting industrial details are preserved in the canvas. The belching smokestacks are those of the Harbison Walker Refractory. To the right of the smokestacks is a clearing on the mountain. These were tracts of company housing for the workers. On the left of the mural are three churches: a red Catholic church, a tan Methodist church, and a Greek Orthodox church with an onion dome. These churches indicate the ethnic diversity of the European immigrants who settled in Mount Union to work at the brick refractories.

About the artist: Paul Rohland (1884–1953) was born in Richmond, VA and studied art in New York with Robert Henri and at the Art Students League and in Europe. He exhibited at the famous 1913 Armory Show in New York. He painted several post office murals in Louisiana and Georgia.