

Renovo Post Office

365 Huron Avenue
Renovo, PA 17764

MURAL

Title: ***Locomotive Repair Operation***

Artist: Harold Lehman

Date: 1943

Medium: Oil on canvas



Within a few months of his winning his commission, artist Harold Lehman travelled to Renovo to photograph and sketch parts of the community. By the fall of 1941, he had ten preliminary designs completed. Soon after, however, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States entered World War II. Lehman decided to scrap his favorite sketches of Renovo's history in favor of a more current topic. Lehman recalled that, "it happened that Renovo was the center of a big locomotive repair operation of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The major thing they did was to repair locomotives, a very vital concern of the government during the war years."

Renovo's mural depicts a jib crane operation at the railroad yards in Renovo. Locomotive wheels are being removed and stacked by the figures in the center of the mural. To the right of the mural, a man waits with an acetylene torch to heat the wheels before repair. The foreman to the left is holding a poster: "America's Answer — Production." This was a popular poster at the beginning of the war so Lehman felt it would be fitting to include it in the work. Since the Treasury Department was trying desperately to link its art program to the war effort, the poster was a touch quickly approved. The mural was installed on August 1, 1943, two months after

the Section of Fine Arts ceased operations. *Locomotive Repair Operation* was one of the last murals to be installed in a U.S. post office.

The repair yards, just a block from the post office, are now closed and the brick buildings depicted in the mural have been abandoned. If these buildings are demolished, the mural will become the town's most visible reminder of this industry and Renovo's role in the war effort.

About the artist: Harold Lehman (1913–2006) studied with famed Mexican muralist David Siquieros. He produced several murals for the various New Deal art projects including an enormous mural for the Riker's Island Penitentiary cafeteria called *Man's Daily Bread*. On the warden's orders, it was destroyed around 1962. Prior to interest in New Deal era art, many works were lost due to neglect, loss, or outright destruction. To learn more about Harold Lehman and his career, visit: <http://haroldlehman.com>

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All of the workers depicted in the mural were based on Renovo residents. Lehman photographed the railroad repair shops and the men working there to use as reference material for his mural.



The Treasury Department discouraged overtly political imagery in the post office artworks, but Lehman has slipped in a reference to the railcar repair workers union. All of the workers in the painting wear blue union buttons on their caps.

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The foreman in Harold Lehman's mural holds this famous WWII-era poster by French designer Jean Carlu.

A few years after completing the mural commissioned Lehman to design a series of war bond posters.

