

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCERS use only

received

date entered

RECEIVED

MAR - 4 '83

FHRC  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

**1. Name**

historic Benjamin B. Leas House-Fort Shirley Site

and/or common Rockview (The Rock)

**2. Location**

street & number U. S. Route 522 north

N/A not for publication

city, town Shirleysburg

N/A vicinity of

congressional district 9th

state Pennsylvania

code

county

Huntingdon

code 061

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name G. R. W. Land Co., Inc.

street & number P.O. Box 67, Route 522

city, town Shirleysburg

N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register/Recorders Office, Huntingdon County Courthouse

street & number Penn Street

city, town Huntingdon

state Pennsylvania

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Huntingdon County Historic Site Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1977-1978  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Huntingdon County Historical Society

city, town Fourth Street, Huntingdon

state Pennsylvania

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

N/A

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Situated in the municipality of Shirleysburg, the Benjamin B. Leas-House-Fort Shirley, locally known as "The Rock," was built on a small rise above Fort Run. The house is a two and a half story rectangular building constructed of locally fired soft red brick. The house measures 41 feet long by 32 feet deep, it is a five bay Greek Revival with an attached Kitchen/Servants quarters, measuring 18 feet square.

The interior of the house is in excellent condition. There are twelve rooms in the main house; four on the first floor, four on the second floor, and four on the third/atic floor. There is a wide central hall with open string of steps and landings. The string board has applied brackets. There is a full basement with a separate cold storage area and spring. The interior moulding is in excellent condition, as well as the original hardware. The interior walls of the house are of wood lathe with hair plaster and the floors are of unpainted hemlock.

Plumbing, electrification, and heating (hot water/ oil and coal furnace) modifications were done in a quality manner as not to destroy the original fabric of the house. The major change to the servants quarters, circa 1950, involved the closing of the fireplace and dividing the room in half to build a modern bathroom/shower. Also at the same time an addition was added, of red brick, to the rear of the servants quarters for an office/den. The other two noticeable exterior changes to the house are: (1) a change from 6/6 windows to 1/1. This was a common practice in the southern part of Huntingdon County, starting about 1920, when the county experienced a building boom and (2) the enclosing of the front of the kitchen/servants quarters exterior entrance (circa 1920).

The only associated out building is a two car garage (circa 1950).

The Leas House has a very strong resemblance to the Grubb Mansion in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The Grubb townhouse was built in 1845/1846. The Leas House, built in 1850, has low third storey windows and wooden lintels at the window openings. The cornice decorated by dentils. The entrance portico has singular fluted doric order columns. The main entrance is through a single panel two inch door, flanked by plain glass side-lights.

The Leas House is built on a tract of land where Fort Shirley originally stood. A 1916 description suggest that the Shirleysburg Female Seminary (the Leas House) is near the approximate location of the 1755 fort site. In 1926 the Pennsylvania Historical Commission and the Society of Pennsylvania Women in New York erected a monument in front of the house near U.S. Route 522.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	
	1755/56 for site of fort		Governor Morris for Fort		
<b>Specific dates</b>	1850 for house	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	Benjamin B. Leas for house		

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Benjamin Leas House is a well preserved and little altered example of a Greek Revival Architecture in the village of Shirleysburg and Shirley Township, Huntingdon County. The house was built by Benjamin Leas, a early merchant and tanner, who was an early railroad commissioner, circa 1846. The Leas House is built on a small knoll, which was the site of a French and Indian War fort. Fort Shirley was constructed circa 1755/56 under the direction of Governor Morris and the leadership of George Crogan.

The Leas House is built on a tract of land where Fort Shirley originally stood. Fort Shirley was one of many, in a line of stockades built in 1755, and stretching out across the State westward from the Susquehanna River. The fort was thea small knoll, near the banks of the Aughwick Creek. Fort Shirley was on a line due north from Fort Littleton, a distance of about 20 miles south. The line northward from Fort Shirley, passes through Jack's Narrows and turns slightly northwest to the borough of Huntingdon (site of Fort Standing Stone).

In 1896, the site was visited as part of a survey for the first edition of Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania. The fort site was located on an elevated plot of ground, near the Shirleysburg Female Seminary (1916), within the limits of the borough of Shirleysburg (Weiser, 1916:567-568). An inspection of the grounds showed no traces of the fort. Except a slight depression in the ground. It was stated by local residents of the time large stones were rrwmed from what was the corner of one of the walls. The State Archaeologist has a collection (1981) of flints and lead balls(?) found on the site. The gun flint appear to be of the period of the fort (Warfel, 1981).

The original order given for the construction of the fort came from Governor Morris. The order was to build three fort stockades for defense. But this order was not adhered to. The forts built were: Fort Patterson; Mexico, Fort Grandville; Lewiston, Fort Littleton; Sugar Cabins (Fulton County), and Fort Shirley; Aughwick. The forts were visited by Morris in December, 1755 and January, 1756. By January 28, 1756, all the forts were named. He ordered that each fort be garrisoned with 75 men. On February 9, 1756, Morris sent a letter to General Shirley, "about 20 miles northward of Fort Littleton, at a place called Aughwick, another fort is erected something larger than Fort Lyttleton, which I have taken the liberity to honor with the name of Fort Shirley. This stands near the great path used by Indians and Indian Traders, ... (Weiser, 1916:569)."

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Sherman Day, in his Historical Collections, stated that the earliest attempt at establishing a settlement by white settlers, within Huntingdon County (originally a part of Cumberland County) was probably in the year 1749, on the Aughwick Creek (Weiser, 1916:571). This was mentioned because an early warent map showing Fort Shirley on the lands of George Crogan, an Indian trader. It was Crogan who was ordered to superintend the building of Fort Shirley, after he received his Captain's Commission 18 December 1755. Prior to Crogan's commission he had built a small stockade at Aughwick (Weiser, 1916:571). After the commission, Crogan probably reinforced his Stockade and made it larger. The description was as Fifty foot square, with blockhouses on two corners and barracks within, capable of housing fifty men.(Weiser,1916:571).

Between 1750 and 1756, both Aughwick and Fort Shirley appear frequently in the Provincial Records. Because of the poor conditions between the British and the Indians, Govenor Denny ordered the evacuation of Fort Shirley 15 October 1756. However, the fort was not totally abandoned or forgotten. In 1775, Rev. Philip Fithian recorded this in his journal; 22 August 1775: " We crossed Ofwick (sic) Creek, and arrived about eight in the evening at Mr. Fowley's, who lives within the walls of old Fort Shirley (Africa, 1883:45-46)."

In 1843, Benjamin B. Leas bought the fort tract. By 1850, he had finished building his house (Welch, 1909:63).The house is a well preserved and little altered example of a Greek Revival urban townhouse found in rural Huntingdon County. The house is not a vernacular Greek Revival commonly found in the country, but a classical textbook example of an urban example transplanted into rural Pennsylvania. The best example that has similiar facade features is the Grubb Mansion, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The facade's design may have been adapted from a plate in John Hall's A Series of Select and Original Designs for Dwelling Houses (Baltimore, 1840) (Snyder,1981).

Little is known of Benjamin B. Leas. He came from a prominent German family that settled in the Shirleysburg area (Germany Valley) in 1829. He and his brother, William B. Leas were both involved in the tanning and merchantile business. Both had interest in the then developing railroad systems in Pennsylvania. Benjamin B. Leas was appointed as a commissoner to The Pennsylvania Railroad in April 1846. In 1848, He and others incorporated into the Drake's Ferry and East Broad Top Railroad Company to establish a roadbed from Drake's Ferry (Mount Union) to the Coal fields in the Broad Top Region. Because of their inability to raise sufficient funds the railroad was never built. Benjamin B. Leas died about 1859, and never saw his dream come true. However his Brother William B. Leas and others started the corporation under a new charter in 1856. The Corporation was called the East Broad Top Railroad and Coal Company. By 1872, the road was open for business from Orbisonia to Mount Union.

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Two years after Leas built the house he sold it to the Shirleysburg Female Seminary. The seminary was incorporated in Shirleysburg as one of the first schools in the county to teach only women.

The commonwealth approved the Act of 1834, that provided local school districts, if they desired, to establish a board of directors, build school houses (at the state's expense), have an annual examination of teachers, school boards could supervise teachers, and levie taxes. But this was not the case in Huntingdon County, especially in Shirleysburg. There was a strong anti-free school movement in the County. There were a number of well-to-do citizens who objected to paying taxes for "free" schools (Roddy,1971:3).

From 1852 to about 1868, Shirleysburg had three Academies for education. "At one time a spirit of hostility to public schools was rife in Shirley township, it being the last district to accept the common school system (Lytle, 1976:178)" About 1866, the directors of the Shirleysburg Seminary closed the doors and sold the building to a David Douglas. In 1893, after serving as an "Old Folks Home" from 1885, after the death of Douglas, the Leas House became an academy for about 10 years (Schreiber, 1976:65-67).

During the time between 1885 to 1893, the Leas House was a resthome for members of the German Baptist Church. The German Baptist Church of Middle Pennsylvania incorporated as the "Old Folks Home of the German Baptist Church," also known as the RockView Home.(Huntingdon County Deed Book, Vol. S-3:454, D-4:530, and Misc. Book Vol. 10:455). This was the last institutional use of the Leas House. It should be noted that two miles from Shirleysburg is Germany Valley, named after settlers originating from the Lancaster County area. They erected a Stone Church in 1836. In 1850, a Church meeting, with representatives from the United States, was held in the Valley.

Since 1910, the house has been used as a residence by a number of individuals, of note a native American;Milo D. Newsome, aka - Lone Star (1950), commercial artist Willard Myers (1970), and to date (1983) the building now serves as offices for the Aughwick Machine Company: aka Moore Metals.

Although the Leas House has had diverse use, it has never been <sup>extensively</sup> altered or changed from its original appearance. The only possible threat to the house or grounds may come from work on U.S. 522.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

-, (1916), Frontier Ports of Pennsylvania, vol. I, 2nd ed., Harrisburg, Penna.  
 Africa, S.C., (1877), History of Huntington and Blair Counties, Phila., Penna..  
 Colriester, Theodore V., ed., (nd), Shirley's Times and Places, WP., WP..  
 Little, H. S., (1876), History of Huntington County, Lds. Rev. Lancaster, Penna

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.75 acres

Quadrangle name Angerich, Penna.

Quadrangle scale 1:25000

UTM References

A	1	255900	4660
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C	1	255900	46720
E			
G			

B	18	255900	4660
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D	18	255900	4660
F			
H			

## Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuance sheet number 3

## List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A
state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title George John Drobeck  
 organization for the G.R.V. Land Company date 9 June 1983  
 street & number 213 South Jefferson Street telephone 611-542-9350  
 city or town Mount Union, state Penna, 17066

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]

title Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer date 9/22/83

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Roddy, Russell S., (1971), History of the County Superintendency in Huntingdon Co, Np. Np.

Snyder, John J., (1981), Correspondence dated 19 June 1961.

Warfel, Steve., (1981), Telephone conversation and visit to Division of Archaeology,  
William Penn Memorial Museum. Summer 1981.

Welch, Charles H., (1910), History of Mount Union, Shirleysburg, and Shirley Township.,  
Mount Union Times Office, Mount Union, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Recorder of Deeds. Deed Books S-3:454, D-4:530, and Misc. Book  
Vol. 10:455.

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Beginning at a point on U. S. 522 North to Mount Union, in the community of Shirleysburg, Huntingdon County, west 363 feet to a point, thence; south 330 feet to a point, Thence; east 363 feet to a point on U.S. 522, thence; north along U.S. 522, 330 feet to the place of beginning. Being the same ground bounded on the north and west by lands now or formerly of T.M. Braton, on the south by lands of now or formerly of B.F. Cornelius, and on the east by Main Street (highway route number 522), containing ± 2.75 acres.

The 2.75 acres includes the original lot bought by Benjamin B. Leas in 1843, and sold to the Shirleysburg Female Seminary 6 January 1852 (Huntingdon County Recorders Office: H-2:509) and the land later bought by David Doughas from Trustees of the Female Seminary 7 April 1866 (Huntingdon County Recorders Office: V-2:57) containing six lots. This is also the same parcel of ground described by Weiser in his chapter of "Frontier Forts in the Cumberland and Juniata Valley," in the first volume of Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania (1916 ed.). Weiser states:

" The writer, after an inspection of the site found it (site of Fort Shirley) on an elevated plot of ground, where now stands the Shirleysburg Female Seminary, with in the limits of the borough of Shirleysburg and on the east side of it (Shirleysburg) about one fourth mile from the Aughwick Creek ( Weiser, 1916:567-568)."



Site of the Benjamin B. Leas  
House and Fort Shirley

