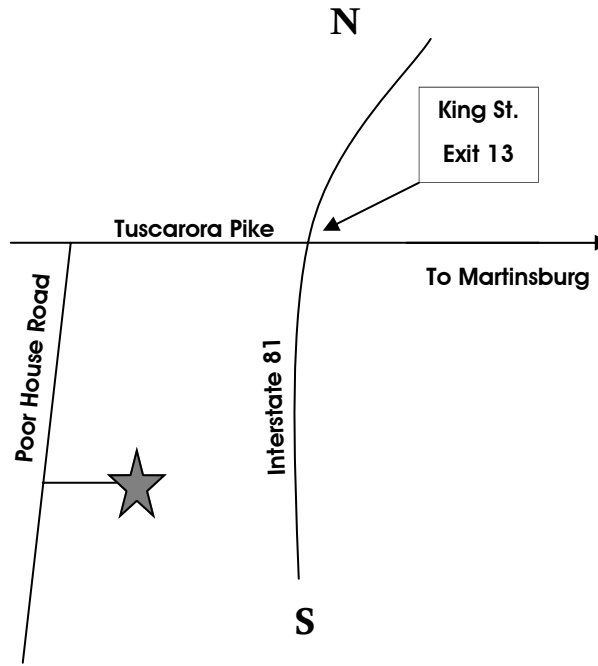


*When you visit Poor House*

*Farm Park you will find...*

- Several miles of walking trails.
- Youth football complex, soccer fields, a play area, and a sand volleyball court.
- A five-acre lake stocked by the Department of Natural Resources.
- Wooden bridge that leads to an island with a gazebo in the middle of the lake.
- Shaded swings under the barn porch.
- Rotary Pavilion which seats 150-170 people, has electric, a grill, and can be reserved on a daily basis.
- Kester Pavilion which seats 64-80 people, has electric, and can be reserved on a daily basis.
- A historic barn built in 1844 which has been refinished and is able to host special events.
- Public Restrooms.



### LOCATION

Poor House Farm Park is located just outside of Martinsburg, WV

From Interstate 81, take Exit 13—King Street.

Go West on Tuscarora Pike for 2.5 miles to Poor House Road. Turn left onto Poor House Road.

Continue 1 mile to the Park entrance on the left.

# Poor House Farm Park



Nestled between the mountains just outside of Martinsburg, West Virginia is the 137-acre Poor House Farm Park. Originally the Berkeley County Alms House and County Farm, the park is owned by Berkeley County and operated by Martinsburg-Berkeley County Parks & Recreation.

**Martinsburg -  
Berkeley County  
Parks &  
Recreation**

(304) 264-4842  
[www.mbcparcs-rec.org](http://www.mbcparcs-rec.org)

# History of the Poor House

In August 1766, 400 acres west of Martinsburg along the Tuscarora were granted to David & Elizabeth Crockett by Lord Fairfax. In 1776, the Crockett's sold a portion of the land to John Snodgrass for 138 pounds. When Snodgrass passed away in 1788, he left the property to his sons. Eventually, this property would become the Berkeley County Alms House and the County Farm.

Most of the stone house on the property began as a log house and was built by John & Elizabeth Emert. They also added a wash house & smoke house to the farm. Limestone on the barn bears the initials J.E. (John Emert) and the year 1844. On March 25, 1850, the Emert's sold the 140-acre farm for \$5,626 to be used for the poor of Berkeley County.

In 1881, the alms house was overcrowded and a frame infirmary building was built 60 feet west of the stone house. In 1882 the following information was recorded: 49 people lived at the alms house; 27 males and 22 females. Records indicated 75 transients, 6 deaths and 3 births at the alms house that year. In 1906, Berkeley County Residents started referring to the property as the county farm.

In August 1916, the brick Steward's house was built by JP Talhelm. Funding for the house was received through the will of Josiah Hedges



Alexander. On July 1, 1919 the court appointed Dr. JH Shipper as the physician at the county farm. His two-year contract allotted payment of \$150 per year. In 1947, Hunter Sencindiver was appointed by the court as superintendent for two years with a salary of \$2420 per year. His duties included farm work and caring for the aged.

There are three known cemeteries on the property dating to deaths before 1849. Grave markers behind the brick Steward's house bear the names: Emert, Bender and Patterson. Two potter's fields are also on the property.

In the 1950's, the advent of the welfare system made the Poor/Alms House system obsolete. The houses on the farm were leased out as private residences and group homes. The Kester family leased the brick house for over 25 years. Virginia Kester was still living in the brick house when she passed away in 2002. The Eastern Panhandle Mental Health organizations leased the stone house until 2001.

The park has been maintained by Martinsburg-Berkeley County Parks & Recreation since 1994. Much work had to be done before the farm could become a public park. In 1994, a new roof was put on the barn, the brick house received a facelift, dilapidated buildings (including the 1881 frame building) were razed, and an



old tire pile was removed.

Construction on the 5-acre lake began in May 1997. In 1999 the Rotary Pavilion was completed, miles of walking trails were mowed into the hills, the soccer fields were finished, the Berkeley County Youth Football League had completed

their complex, the back of the barn had been extended and a wooden deck was added. On October 27, 1999 the DNR stocked the lake for the first time.

In 2000, a second pavilion was built which would later be named the Kester Pavilion in memory of Virginia Kester. The WV Division of Highways took over the road, widening and paving it. A gazebo was added to the lake island, a laminated bridge was installed to connect the island to the lake brim, a restroom facility was built, and a play area was added by the Rotary Pavilion.

In 2001 the barn stonework was re-pointed. In 2002 a storage hut was constructed and PVC coated benches were added around the lake. In 2003 the milking parlor was repaired, heat was added to the barn, and a handicap accessible laminated bridge that crosses the Tuscarora creek was added. In 2004 sand volleyball courts were constructed and the addition of a handicap accessible ramp and porch in front of the barn was begun as a Boy Scout Eagle project.

As with most Parks & Recreation endeavors, Poor House Farm Park is a work in progress. It will continue to provide respite for those who visit the 'poor house.'

