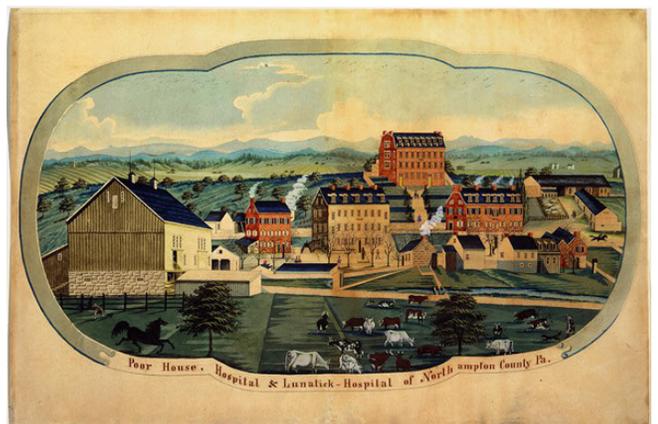# Northampton County Conservation District Headquarters:
## An Interesting History



Long before the 171-year-old Greystone Building became the headquarters of the Northampton County Conservation District, it was home to the county's poor, homeless and mentally ill. Built in 1838 by the county commissioners for the county's indigent, and in a time far removed from the politically correct era of today, it was bluntly named the "Hospital, Poorhouse & Lunatick House of Northampton County." The philosophy then current in America was that the poor could provide some relief for themselves by



doing agricultural labor to defray the cost of their care through the sale of farm produce. So the institution was officially known as the "Northampton County House of Employment," and was part of a 235-acre farm on which residents lived and worked. In one word, the poorhouse, as well as the farm, was simply known as "Gracedale."

Gracedale was the name originally given to 1,000 acres settled by Moravians here in 1745. An early source described the environs as "nestled in a vale, near a splendid spring." Today, Gracedale is the name of the county nursing home, a modern 10-story high-rise and one of Pe nnsylvania's largest county nursing homes, with nearly 800 residents. It is located just a short walk from the historical county "lunatick house," today's Greystone Building, in which the County Conservation District is headquartered.



In 1837, long after the Moravian settlement had ended, the county commissioners bought 235 acres of the original 1,000-acre settlement from the Moravian Church for $21,150 to be the site for the new county poorhouse. Completed in 1838, the three-story stone structure, 40-by-90 feet in size, was constructed at a cost of $6,284.99. In less than a year after it was built, the county facility was home to 117 elderly, poor, displaced and

mentally ill people. The first annual directors report in 1839 for the Northampton County House of Employment listed the produce of Gracedale as rye, wheat, corn, potatoes, flax, beets, onions, radishes, cucumbers, hay, cabbage and pumpkins. Other products included veal, pork, mutton, eggs, butter and soap. Products made by the female poor included women's frocks, stockings, bed tickings, pillow cases, vests, linen shirts, caps, shoes, pillows and aprons. These items were all sold to the public for poor-support funds.

By 1950, county poorhouses ceased to function as such because care of the poor and mentally ill were taken over by other agencies, as most poorhouses became homes dedicated exclusively to the elderly or permanently disabled. The former Hospital, Poorhouse & Lunatick House of Northampton County, known as the Greystone Building today, is home to Northampton County's Farmland Preservation, Ag Extension, Bridges and Vector Control offices; Parks & Recreation Department and Backup 911 Center, as well as the Conservation District.