

# 'It's home to me': Sterling Cemetery

BY GEORGE GILL  
Times-Mirror Staff Writer

The first burial on the land that became Sterling Cemetery took place before it was organized as a cemetery. That's one of many historical facts you learn from Sterling Cemetery agent Louise Fletcher, 84.

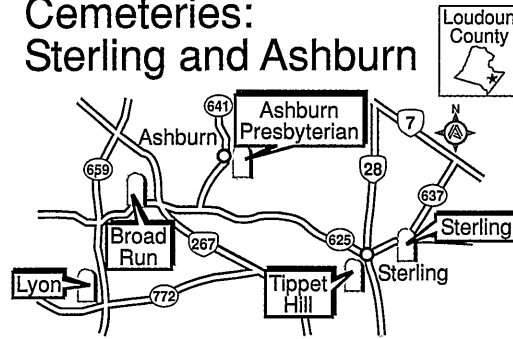
Fletcher helps run and take care of the cemetery, working on behalf of the cemetery's board of directors.

She said the first person buried at the site was Mary Allen Sexton, who lived from 1826 to 1913. The Sexton family owned the land where the cemetery now sits. "She was believed to be the mother of William Sexton, so they buried her there before it was organized as a cemetery," Fletcher recalled. William Sexton lived from 1844 to 1929.

Sterling Cemetery on Church Road was organized in 1914. Fletcher's uncle, William Groome, was the first president of the Sterling Cemetery board of directors.

The smaller Old Sterling Cemetery on the north side of Church Road opened first, organized in January 1892. It suffered from having a lot of big stones in its soil,

## Cemeteries: Sterling and Ashburn



Fletcher explained.

"That's why after they had buried about 30 or so, they decided to come across the road," she said. "The soil over here is garden soil — you never see a rock or stone."

The two cemeteries became incorporated as one — Sterling Cemetery — in 1977.

Wandering around the site, you see graves of many veterans — from the Vietnam War, Korean War, World War II and as far back as World War I.

Fletcher said Sterling Cemetery feels like home for her.

"It's home to me. I used to climb right through the fence there and walk to school," she said, pointing to the southern side of the cemetery now bordered by many houses. "There were

no houses on that side — that was our farm."

She said it's also the final resting place for several of her family members. Among them are her husband, grandparents, two brothers, her mother and father, three aunts and an uncle.

Fletcher began helping her husband, Charlie, at the cemetery in 1973. She said he refilled the graves, took care of flowers, sold graves and took care of other chores at the cemetery.

"He was involved in the cemetery right up until he



Times-Mirror Staff Photo/Jason Hornick.  
Mary Ellen Sexton was the first person buried in Sterling Cemetery in 1913.

died," she said. Charlie Fletcher died on June 5, 2005.

She said her husband was very active in the community, serving as president of 4-H, helping start the fire company in Ashburn and serving as deacon of Ashburn Calvary Baptist Church for 55 years. "He was involved in everything."

According to Fletcher, in 1986, the SAAR Foundation, an education and health charity, acquired 144 graves in a separate section of the cemetery for Muslim burials. Since then, she said, Muslim families have bought additional individual graves in that section. The Muslim section has more than 708 sites for such burials, she said. The last such available site at the cemetery sold in mid-March 2006, Fletcher said. ♦

## ❖ Cascades development springs up around family cemetery

Tiny Dulin-Keene cemetery is encircled by a half-dozen homes in the Cascades area of Sterling, near the intersection of Cascades Parkway and Hampshire Station.

When the Cascades development began taking shape in 1989, residential development built up around the cemetery, which is encircled by a fence with a locked black iron gate. The headstones there are for Newton Keene (Sept. 9, 1804 to April 8, 1880), wife Elizabeth Dulin Keene (April 11, 1806 to Dec. 24, 1894) and a daughter, Elizabeth D. Keene Kinney (Dec. 15, 1834 to Aug. 13, 1898).

According to the Elgin Net genealogy Web site, Newton Keene and Elizabeth Dulin mar-

ried in Montgomery County, Md., Feb. 26, 1824. Later they settled in Loudoun on an estate known as "Green Plains." Citing a Loudoun newspaper article from 1956, the Web site said, "Green Plains" was situated among "gently rolling hills with a beautiful view of the Blue Ridge on a clear day." The couple had 13 children. Some of the Keene's family farming implements have been on display at the Loudoun Museum.

According to the article, daughter Elizabeth Dulin moved west and got married. Late in her life she asked to be buried in her birthplace. She was laid to rest beside her parents in 1898.