

## Cemeteries Are Resting Place For City's Early Residents



Long ago here in Sterling Heights, 90% of the land was working family farms. Most likely your home is sitting on one of those farms. Have you wondered about the people who lived here over 100 years ago? Included in the city's cemeteries are two historical cemeteries that are the final resting place of many of these early residents: Sterling Grove Cemetery located on Saal Road and 19 Mile and St. Paul Lutheran Church Cemetery located on 18 Mile Road, west of Hayes.

**Sterling Grove Cemetery:** When the land was first deeded to become a cemetery there were strict regulations. Hedges and shrubbery were to be very well maintained; the beautifying of the individual lots was to be undertaken by the owner. Approximately 237 people are buried in Sterling Grove. Back in the late 1800s it cost \$1.50 to dig a grave for an adult and \$1 for a child under 10. (Now the cost would be about \$1,200.) Among those buried there are members of the Saal family. Ages of those who are buried there range from children who lived only a short time like Alvin Schildt, who died at 1 month old, to the elderly Mrs. Stadler, who passed away at 95. The earliest burial was in 1879, and most likely the family of that 22-year-old young man is no longer around to take care of his grave. There no longer is an association to take care of this land.

**St. Paul Cemetery:** This cemetery began as a family burial ground for the Kukuk family. The land was part of their farm until the owner donated the property to St. Paul Lutheran Church in May 1887. One of the earliest graves is that of Helene Kukuk, dated Dec. 10, 1883 with the most current resident being laid to rest in 1992. The cemetery has a civil war veteran and Adolph Kukuk, a WWII veteran. There are more than 50 residents buried there, many of them were parishioners of St. Paul Lutheran Church. The entrance is almost completely blocked off as 18 Mile Road is not maintained at this time.

In both these cemeteries there has been much destruction, especially at St. Paul's, due to the desolate location and the difficulty in accessing the area. Many stones are missing, some stones have been moved and no longer rest in their family plot, some are defaced to the extent that names and dates cannot be read, others knocked over and smashed. It is our responsibility as the new tenants of Sterling Heights, to show respect to those who were here before us. We must make sure that where they rest is not neglected.

So keep a watchful eye there, visit once in a while, maybe pick up a piece of paper that was blown in or a bottle or can that was dropped. Let us show the future generations that we care and have respect for these final resting places.

