

2nd Drowning Within 3 Days

Car Plunges Over Cliff; Sanatoga Father Drowns

By CHARLES PITCHFORD

Mercury Staff Writer

An early morning swimming party ended in tragedy Monday as the cold, quiet waters of the abandoned John T. Dyer Quarry in Union Township claimed its second victim in the past four days.

The body of 20-year-old Michael P. Franey, Welsh Drive, Sanatoga, was pulled from 75-feet of water by rescue workers shortly after 11:30 a.m.

The victim and two youths

were in the rear seat of a car that plunged backward over a 40-foot embankment into the water at the abandoned quarry. Two companions jumped to safety as the car left the edge of the cliff.

Franey was pronounced dead by Dr. Neitz Seibert at Reading Hospital at 12:15 p.m.

A hospital spokesman said death tentatively was attributed to drowning but an autopsy is scheduled this morning.

State Trooper George

Kolinofsky, Reading Barracks, said the accident occurred as the victim and four friends were preparing to leave the area after they decided it was too cold to go swimming.

According to police, Jeffrey Townsley, 411 Apple St., was driving the car that backed over the embankment shortly after 7:30 a.m.

Townsley and Harvey Lichtenwalner, 353 N. Washington St., jumped from the car as the rear wheels

crossed the edge of the cliff.

Police said Michael Meixner, 311 East St., and Barry Katzin, Douglassville RD 1, were in the car with the victim when it made its fatal plunge.

According to police, the five youths drove to the north side of the quarry shortly before 6:30 a.m. It was too cold for swimming and they built a fire, waiting for the sun to appear but after waiting nearly an hour, they decided to leave.

(Continued on Page Three)

1970 Aug car plunges over quarry cliff

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Nov 25, 2024

(Continued from Page One)

Kolinofsky said as they were leaving the area, one of the boys remembered that clothing and blankets were left behind and rather than walk back to the edge of the cliff, Townsley backed the car to the campsite.

As the car edged near the cliff, it picked up speed and the brakes failed, Townsley told police. In a frantic attempt to stop the car he pulled the emergency brake and when that failed, he yelled to the others, "get out of the car."

Meixner managed to leap clear of the car as it plunged downward to the water. He landed uninjured in the water several feet from where the 1959 sedan entered.

Katzin was unable to get out of the car until it settled on the bottom. He escaped and fought his way to the surface where he was pulled from the water.

Katzin was taken to Medical Center North by police. The youth suffered head and chest injuries and, according to hospital officials, "swallowed a great deal of water."

Katzin said Townsley was backing the car up in an attempt to turn the vehicle around when the accident occurred.

Katzin said he was nearly asleep in the back seat and did not remember too much of what was happening except someone yelled to get out of the car before it fell through the air.

"Everything happened so fast, I really didn't know what was going through my mind. All the windows and the two front doors of the car were open when it went over the cliff and the front and rear windshield shattered as the car hit the water," Katzin recalled.

"I don't remember how I got out of the car, but I know it stopped sinking and settled on the bottom before I was able to find an opening and fight my way to the surface."

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Katzin said this was not the first time he went to the quarry to swim and that he and his friends were in the water there often. "But we never ran into anything like this," he added.

"As I left the car, I really thought I would never reach the surface. I don't know how long I was in the water, probably only a few minutes at most, but it seemed like hours."

"Mike (Franey) was sleeping next to me in the back seat. I think the impact of the fall awoke him and he must have been in more shock than I was."

Katzin said he didn't make any attempts to rescue Franey because he panicked and with everything happening so fast, all I thought of was getting to the surface. I am lucky to be alive."

Police were notified of the tragedy by one of the two youths who jumped from the car. They arrived at the scene shortly before 8:30 a.m. and with the help of the Reading Fire Co. Rescue Unit began searching for the body.

The victim, in the water for more than four hours, was pulled to the surface by Albert P. Batastin, deputy chief of the Reading Fire Co. Rescue Unit.

According to Batastin, the body was found floating face up in 65 feet of water, about 10 feet from the quarry floor.

He didn't know if Franey tried to escape from the car or was thrown from the wreckage. Police said it is believed the victim drowned as he attempted to reach the surface. They declined further comment on any possible in-

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https://www.newspapers.com/image/44086496/

juries received in the fall pending autopsy results.

South End Towing Service, Reading, pulled the car from a depth of 75 feet and up the side of the cliff.

A shotgun was found in the car after it was pulled from the water. Police admitted the presence of the weapon but said it is not known who owns the gun or why it was in the car.

Stone Crusher Burns; Police Suspect Arson

Arson is suspected in the early morning fire that swept through an abandoned stone crusher on Monocacy Hill Road, 1½ miles north of Route 422 in Amity Township Monday.

The four-story frame structure, owned by the township, burned to the ground as more than 25 firemen battled to keep flames and sparks from spreading to nearby trees.

Henry Rhoads, Amity Fire

Monday's tragedy was the second drowning at the same site in three days.

The body of 19-year-old James Stefanik, Reading, was pulled from the water the past Friday. He drowned while swimming with two companions in 65-feet of water.

Friday's drowning occurred on the south side of the quarry but was less than 300 yards away from where Franey's body was discovered.

According to police, Stefanik suddenly disappeared beneath the surface "without making a sound."

Police said the quarry which abandoned its operations more than 20 years ago and slowly filled with water, is the site of several drownings in the recent years. The property reportedly is owned by Thomas McPoyle, Norristown.

The quarry is not posted, according to police, but all roadways leading to the large water-filled pit were closed off because of the danger and drownings.

A gravel entrance way, however, was opened this past Friday to allow rescue workers to reach the cliff's edge. The

roadway was not blocked since then and Monday's swimmers easily reached the swimming hole.

Born in Reading, Franey was a son of James and Mary (Bowser) Franey, 165 W. Ridge Pike, Limerick, and husband of Nadine S. (Stong) Franey.

He was employed as a molder

at Keystone Foundry, Cross and Keim streets, the past year.

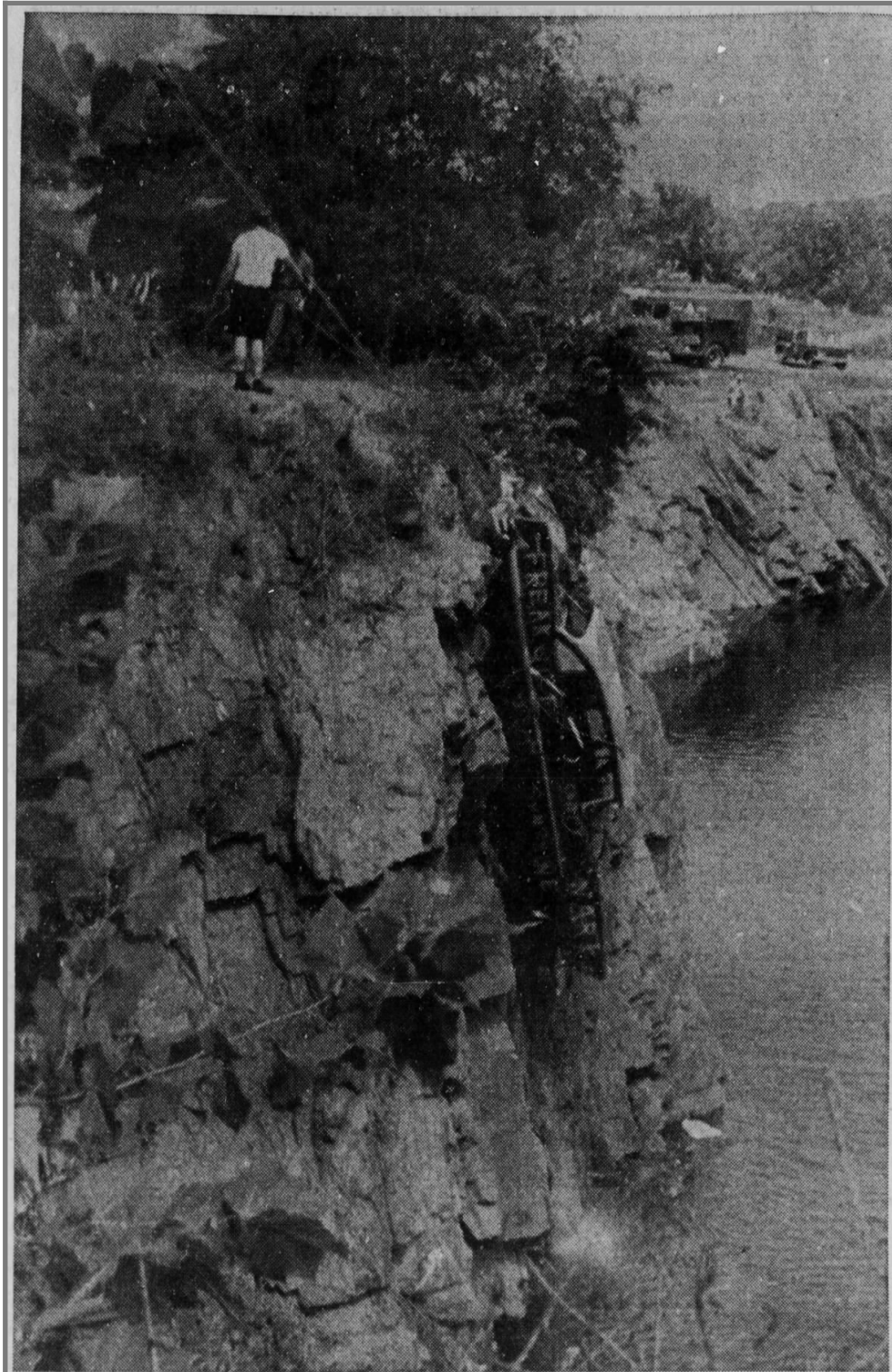
Surviving with his widow and parents are a daughter, Stacy Lynn, 11 months, and a brother James T., serving with the Army in Georgia.

Skean Funeral Home, 404 High St., is in charge of arrangements.

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THE LONG WAY BACK — The 1959 sedan that carried a young area man to his death when it plunged over a 40-foot embankment into 75 feet of water at a quarry in Union Township, is pulled from the water Monday

morning. The victim was identified as Michael P. Franey, 20, Welsh Road, Sanatoga. Four other youths with him managed to escape. Police attributed the accident to faulty brakes. (Mercury Staff Photo)

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INVESTIGATION BEGINS—State Police from the Reading Barracks begin their investigation into the Monday morning accident that claimed the life of Michael P. Franey, 20, Welsh Drive, Sanatoga. While one trooper checks the interior of the car another holds a

shotgun found in the vehicle. The car went over a 40-foot embankment into 75 feet of water at the abandoned John T. Dyer Quarry. Four others with Franey escaped. (Mercury Staff Photo)

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