

Wilmington boy, 7, drowns in quarry behind Boys Club

By JERRY HAGER

A 7-year-old city youngster drowned yesterday afternoon when he slipped from a rock and fell into an old stone quarry near 17th and Church streets on the property of the H. Fletcher Brown branch of the Boys Club, Inc.

Wilmington police said Emanuel C. Benson of 2904 Bowers St. had spent some time at the Boys Club yesterday morning. Shortly before 11 a.m., he left with friends to go fishing at the quarry behind the club. About 11 a.m., the friends ran back to the club looking for help. Benson had slipped from a rock, fallen in the water and didn't surface.

Divers searched the waters of the quarry the rest of the day looking for the child's body. At 4:10 p.m., two state police divers who had come by helicopter from Bridgeville and Camden-Wyoming found the youth's body, not far from where he fell in. He was dead on arrival at the Delaware Division at 4:27 p.m., police said.

The quarry is at the rear of the Boys Club property, on land which Gilbert Jackson, unit director of the club, said had been donated to the Boys Club five years ago by the Continental Can Co.

Jackson said when Benson's friends ran up to the club to get help, four employees, Richard Hearne, a crafts instructor, Ellen McLean, a swimming instructor, Joel Riley, a lifeguard, and Richard Johnson, a physical instructor, all ran down to the quarry. Ms. McLean, Riley and Hearne dove in the water trying to find the child, but had no success in the dark waters.

Johnson called the fire board for help, and a scuba diver from the Wilmington Bureau of Fire was sent to the scene.

Later in the day, state police divers were called in to help search. Sgt. Jerry L. Weller and Cpl. Richard J. Marvel were sent from downstate. "There are plenty of other diving teams, we were the ones available," Weller explained.

Benson was a student at the Green Street Elementary School, friends said.

They said that he and his friends were probably fishing for turtles or

carp in the deep waters. "Some people say they have caught carp and bass there," Jackson said.

According to Jackson, the quarry is a favorite swimming hole for many in the neighborhood. He said the high fences and no trespassing signs don't keep people out, and the club doesn't have the funds to post regular patrols to keep swimmers and fishermen away. Many of the children who gathered near the quarry to watch the police and firemen at work agreed.

"There's trout and snapping turtles in there," said Darryl Boyer, 16. "People go swimming there all the time," chimed in Richard Jolly, 14. Both youths live near the quarry and both said they swim and fish there.

Allen Douglas told of the time about two months ago when he and four others were diving for tin cans filled with dirt and thrown into the quarry. "My friend got his foot snagged. I was [swimming] ahead of him and felt him grab my leg. I turned around and he pointed to his foot. He held on and I pulled him up," the 13-year-old recounted. Charles Richard, 14, who also lives near the quarry, said he had been there when it had happened.

Others in the crowd attested to the heavy use the quarry gets in hot weather. They pointed to the remnants of a raft on the far side of the quarry that had been built earlier in the year and floated to the center for swimmers to rest on, and to the dirt paths and rest area near the water that were worn with much use.

Jackson said that the Boys Club doesn't condone swimmers using the quarry, but claims little can be done to stop them. "You should come by on the weekend. The place is packed — kids and grown-ups alike. And not just from around here," he said.

Jackson said he has never heard any community complaints about the quarry, but mothers who gathered there as word of what happened spread through the community said the place isn't safe.

Juanita Guy of the 2200 block Jessup St. complained that there is no gate blocking the well-worn dirt path which leads to it. "What child isn't going to walk down a dirt path when they see one?" she asked.

Ms. Guy, an employee with the Wilmington Housing Authority, said she would like to see the fence around the property repaired. "There's holes all over it," she asserted. Other mothers agreed. "A fence with barbed wire and briars to cover the paths, that's what's needed," one said.

As the police divers, Weller and Marvel checked their diving gear and waited for the police helicopter to take them back downstate, they explained the dangers of swimming and skin diving in a quarry to the boys and girls who gathered around them.

"There's a line about 20 or 25 feet down where the water temperature changes 20 degrees. That's why we wore our diving suits. Underground springs feed into the quarry and that's what makes it so cold," Weller said, explaining that the cold water can cause cramps.

Two convicts escape in Pa; still at large

WEST CHESTER, Pa. — A convicted murderer and a convicted burglar escaped yesterday while being taken for sentencing into the Chester County Courthouse here and remained at large late last night, according to authorities.

The escapees were identified as Martin Knecht, 19, of Downingtown, and Francis Brewer, 34, of Philadelphia. Both are considered extremely dangerous.

Knecht was convicted in 1977 of second-degree murder in the stabbing death of a Downingtown man. His sentencing had been delayed by appeals.

Brewer, who was convicted of