

Standard Sentinel, September 18, 1933

# **FOUR MEN RESCUED FROM FLOODED MINE: ONE STILL IN SLOPE**

## Rescued Men At Truedale Colliery Waded Neck Deep Through Water.

### TELL OF THEIR EXPERIENCE

Estimated That Flood Damage Caused To Roads In Region Will Amount To \$30,000.

How it feels waiting to die in a mine with escape cut off by rising water was told yesterday by four men who rescued themselves from the flooded interior of Glen Alden Coal Company's Truesdale colliery.

One man, Raphael Sweeney, 31, is still in the mine while hope for his safety, wanes. His four companions, who dug through cave-ins and waded neck deep through water to the outer world are Andrew Levandowski, 46, laborer; Casimir Staggers, 40, miner; Albert Tucker, 36, helper, and Andrew Matikiewicz, 48, miner.

While Wilkes-Barre and its environs was recovering from effects of one of the worst storms in its history which caused two deaths, the rescued miners were lying in bed talking to friends, too nervous to sleep.

The sudden rush of water which almost caught 84 other workers, sent the five miners to the uppermost reaches of a coal chamber where they crouched watching the stream creep closer and closer, below them.

There they were, "waiting to die," as Matikiewicz expressed it to friends and members of his family gathered by his bedside.

In broken English he told how the group chose him leader because of his longer experience, how Sweeney became separated and lost; the race to a point of safety just ahead of a wall of water and the thrill of relief in seeing the first light of a shaft after 14 hours of entombment.

Further down the slope than the others, the men were cleaning out a gangway when they heard what sounded almost like the shot of a big gun as water burst into the mine from rain-swollen streams above.

At first they ran precipitously but Matikiewicz went back for a pick, an axe and some nails. He was caught once before in a soft-coal mine in Oklahoma and appreciated the value of such tools. Without them they might have died.

After reaching the highest spot

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## FOUR MEN RESCUED FROM FLOODED MINE

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they could find, they huddled together for warmth and slept about an hour to conserve energies. They made a crude raft to which they planned clinging if the water should reach their perch but three feet below it stopped and began to subside.

Sweeney, youngest of the lot, was impatient and it was his anxiety to get out instead of waiting in a place of safety that led to his being separated from the others.

He had crawled ahead hoping to find an exit, Matikiewicz said, and they could see his light signalling them to come on. Just then came a crash of falling dirt, a swirl of water and that was the last they saw of him.

The older man was the only one who saved his box full of lunch but they were so busy with thoughts of escape they did not stop to eat.

As the water subsided, taken out with powerful pumps, their fellow workers outside were running, the men made their torturous way where waiting friends and relatives wept with joy on seeing them.

Earlier, Shelby D. Dimmick, vice president of the company, had officially stated there was no hope of the miners being found alive in the light of conditions as pictured by workers who escaped before the water caught them.

Just before reaching safety, the men had to wade through water up to their necks, their hands clinging to a trolley wire above from which the power had been closed.

The other men praised the courage and calmness of Matikiewicz, which they said was largely responsible for them getting out alive.

John Wasilewski, 50-year-old miner, was killed by the first rush of water in what doctors said was a heart attack caused by shock.

The other victim of the storm was Andrew Smith, Jr., 29, of Ashley, who fell into the swollen Solomon's creek as the bank caved in beneath him. His body was recovered several hours later.

The only official estimate of flood damage was made by J. C. Gold, state highway official, who said it would cost more than \$30,000 to repair roads in his territory.

Coal company officials made no estimate of the damage to their property but said it was extensive and that most of their collieries would remain closed for several weeks.

Damage to homes in the southern section of the city was extensive but not as serious as was indicated by first reports.