

Beyond basketball

By: Don Casada

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In the Casada family photo collection, there's a picture of the 1927-28 Bryson City High School basketball team, which according to a note in the handwriting of my father on the reverse side of the image, were champs of the Smoky Mountain Conference, and includes the names of all the fellows.

There are three of the eight team members of whom I have personal knowledge and memory – Carroll Wright, Fischer Black and my father, Commodore Casada.



1927-28 Smoky Mountain Conference Champs

1st row, L-R: Clyde Wolfe, H.H. Welch, Denning Woodard, Commodore Casada, Carroll Wright
2nd row, L-R: Jack Enloe, Fischer Black, Ronald Eller

Over the years, I'd seen the photo, which I suspect was taken by [Doc Kelly Bennett](#), a number of times as I browsed through the family album. In 2011, I removed and scanned it in to show at a celebration of Daddy's 100th birthday. But I always focused on the boys in the picture, and it wasn't until recently that my eye caught the out of focus background elements in the photo – a bit of town to the right of Carroll Wright and part of the Bryson City Cemetery to the left of Clyde Wolfe and Jack Enloe.

So I thought it would be interesting to do a little research and see to what extent the fellows on the basketball team had a connection to those buried in the cemetery. It turned out that their lives– like those of much of the community at that time – were intricately interwoven with those who take their final rest on the Hallowed Hill grounds.

Following is a brief overview of those connections. I'm confident that there are links which I've missed.

First row, L-R

1) Clyde Wolfe: His father, [Clark](#), and mother, [Georgia](#), are buried in the cemetery. His mother had died when he was a youngster – in 1917; his father died in 1931. His father had a restaurant on Everett Street; Clyde worked there as a waiter. We have no record of Clyde's death, but he had apparently died before his father, since there is no mention of him in his father's obituary. There is a record of his hand and wrist being injured in a car wreck three miles above town on July 14, 1929. [Judge McKinley Edwards](#) was a passenger in the vehicle. Both received treatment by Dr. P.R. Bennett.

2) H.H. Welch (Harley Harrison Welch, Jr): His grandparents, [John Manous](#) and [Margaret Battle Welch](#), uncle [Charlie Edwin](#) and aunt [Ellen Piercy Welch](#), first cousin [Ernest Welch](#) and Ernest's wife [Hazel Seay Welch](#) are all buried in the cemetery. Harley's father, H.H. had a barber shop in town. Harley Harrison Welch, Jr died in 1961 and is buried in Max Meadows, Virginia.

3) Denning Woodard: [Willa Bell Penland](#) first married Denning Woodard. She later married [James Don Blankenship](#). They are the parents of [Donna Jane Blankenship Bentley](#), and all three are buried in the cemetery, along with the parent of James Don, [James Barnet](#) and [Arvie Garland Blankenship](#). Denning Woodard married Betty Wiggins, and had a son Denning, Jr. Denning Sr. died in 1975 and is buried in Swain Memorial Park.

4) Commodore Casada: The closest kin to the Casada family in the cemetery are 2nd cousins, and to be honest, I'm not sure that my parents were aware of those relations. But my father was a pallbearer for at least fourteen folks who are buried there, including our next-door neighbors, [Stanley](#) and [Marianna Fischer Black](#), [Thurman](#) and [Nell Leatherwood](#), [Miss Jessie Shank](#), [Earl Monteith](#), [Cora Woody](#), [Christine Hall Woody](#), [Lois Brooks Close](#), [Henry Ellett](#), [IK Stearns](#) and his son [Joe Stearns](#), [Max Witt](#), and [Sadie Leatherwood](#). Many of those named were not only friends, but working colleagues at Carolina Wood Turning and their family members as well as fellow church members at the Presbyterian Church. Commodore Casada married Anna Lou Moore in 1941 and together they had three children, Jim, Annette and Don. He died at the age of 101 in 2011 and is buried in Swain Memorial Park.

5) Carroll Wright: Carroll Wright has no immediate family in the Bryson City Cemetery, but has distant kin. He was a pallbearer for at least 18 individuals who are buried there, including [Stanley](#) and [Marianna Fischer Black](#), [Thurman](#) and [Nell Leatherwood](#), [Miss Jessie Shank](#), [Earl Monteith](#), [Cora Woody](#), [Christine Hall Woody](#), [Emma May DeHart Jones](#), [H.E. \("Ern"\) Eller](#), father of his teammate Ronald, [Henry Ellett](#), [IK Stearns](#) and his son [Joe Stearns](#), [John L Orr](#), [Lyndon Conley](#), [Mary Enloe Beck](#), [Nicie Beck](#), and [Sadie Leatherwood](#). Carroll worked at Carolina Wood Turning for a number of years before leaving to operate Carolina Building Supply, and so like Commodore Casada, many of those for whom Carroll did pallbearing service were working colleagues and their family and also fellow members of First Baptist Church. Carroll married Juanita Thomas in 1932. They had two children, Carroll, Jr. and Kay. Carroll, Sr. died in 1996 and is buried in Swain Memorial Park.

Second row, L-R

1) [Jack Enloe](#): Jack's parents ([Arthur](#) and [Pauline](#)), his brother [Robert](#), grandparents [Ace](#) and [Clarinda](#) Enloe, and Uncles [Clyde](#), [Leonard](#) and [Ben](#) are all buried in the cemetery. Jack went to work for Southern Railroad in Asheville after finishing high school. In the fall of 1929, he and some friends made a trip to Canton, Ohio. Jack contracted double pneumonia and died there on November 3. His body was brought back to Bryson City, and was buried in the Bryson City Cemetery.

2) Fischer Black: Fischer's parents, [Stanley](#) and [Marianna Fischer Black](#), sister [Ellen Black Winston](#) and her husband [Dick Winston](#), his Aunt, [Amy Black Bryson](#) and her husband, [TD Bryson](#) as well as several of their children – his first cousins – and others in the extended family are buried in the cemetery. Fischer studied at the University of North Carolina where he graduated with a degree in Electrical Engineering. He worked for Nantahala Power & Light, Potomac Electric (Washington, DC), was Editor and Publisher of Electrical World, a McGraw-Hill trade magazine, and retired from Tampa Electric Company as Vice-President of the Board. He married Elizabeth Clark Zemp; they had three children, Fischer, Jr., Blakeney, and Louis Engleman (Lee). Fischer died in Tampa in 1999.

3) Ronald Eller: Ronald's father, [H.E. \("Ern"\)](#) and mother, [Viola Eller](#) are buried in the cemetery. Ronald married Dessie Parker of Sylva in 1934. He worked for a while at Carolina Wood Turning Company before going to work at a cotton mill in Charlotte. He died in 1985 and is buried at Sharon Memorial Park in Charlotte.