

The

# Cape Fear Courier

Columbus, Brunswick and New Hanover counties, North Carolina

February 25, 2013



## SEEKING SAFE HARBOR

The container ship *Islandia*, built in China in 2004 as the *Syms Taishan* and now sailing under the German flag, churns down North Carolina's Cape Fear River toward open ocean and its next port of call. Southport, Brunswick County.

# Seeking Safe Harbor

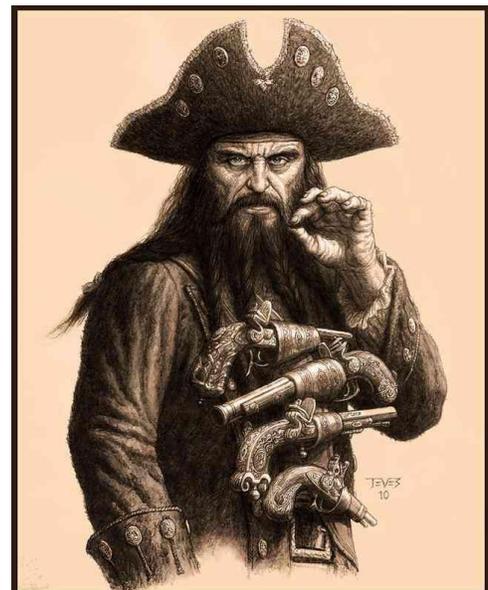


**High school friend Sharon Davis, who now lives on the coast, on the Wilmington riverfront.**

Many of the place names of the North Carolina coast – Cape Lookout, Frying Pan Shoals, the Graveyard of the Atlantic, Cape Fear – don't sound very tourist friendly.

There are snakes and the occasional alligator in local swamps, where plants grow that devour insects, not the other way around. Hurricanes have ravaged the land. Pirates Stede Bonnett and Blackbeard raided and evaded the law here before their capture and Blackbeard's beheading. Sunken Civil War ships and German submarines litter the sea floor among scores of other vessels.

But tourism is what the region is all about now, though February is not the high season.



**Blackbeard**

**– Continued overleaf**

# Seeking Safe Harbor

– **Continued**

Some of the restaurants where you'd like to eat have been closed for awhile and won't reopen for another month. By late spring people will be sweltering in hour-long lines for shrimp, crab and flounder.

Room rates are ridiculously low, reflecting the lack of customers.

The visitors here now wear hockey jerseys and Callaway caps, marking the beginning of the annual migration of Canadians in search of a golf fix before NHL games really start to matter. They don't think wind, rain and 40 degrees is so bad.

Considering it's been a couple of years since my beach fix and it was my last full day in North Carolina, I didn't think it was that bad, either.

Most of my day was spent in Wilmington, one of the state's two seaports, located a few miles inland on the Cape Fear River, and on Bald Head Island, which is Cape Fear itself – a spit of sand protruding into the Atlantic at the river's mouth that has snagged more than its share of coastal shipping and hurricanes and now is home to a resort community reachable only by passenger ferry.

Cars aren't allowed on Bald Head, where the magazines cover sunrises and –sets, golf, yachts and the need to own real estate in a place where the increasingly hostile outside world must not be allowed to intrude.

The 20-minute mid-afternoon ferry to the island carried a few school children doing math on their way back home. The 5:30 ferry to Southport on the mainland was



**Cape Fear, North Carolina region**

packed with Spanish-speaking workers catching up on news and messages on their smart phones after a day on the job.



**When I was young, North Carolina school children collected quarters to save the battleship *USS North Carolina* from the scrap heap to be moored as a museum in Wilmington.**

# A thousand friends and one hero



**Rowland spruced up for Vonta Leach Day.**

We wanted to get off the freeway to the beach and take some of the back roads we took growing up, before you could bypass small towns like Rowland at 70 mph in a rush for salt air and seafood.

"There's a historical marker up here – I guess you could say it's a historical marker – and I want you to see it," Sharon said.

Right below the city limits sign that proclaimed Rowland the "Town of 1,000 Friends" was a simple strip of metal: "Home of Vonta Leach, Baltimore Ravens, 2013 Super Bowl Champions."

Not old, but still historic, and a nice chuckle.

We slowed for Main Street, which was crowded with people. Purple streamers ran from tree to tree. Then we noticed the banner hanging across the street at the railroad station and we had a simultaneous realization.

Sunday was Vonta Leach Day in Rowland, and the town had turned out to welcome the Ravens' fullback, buy "Rowland has a Ring" sweatshirts and get his autograph.

So we did, too.



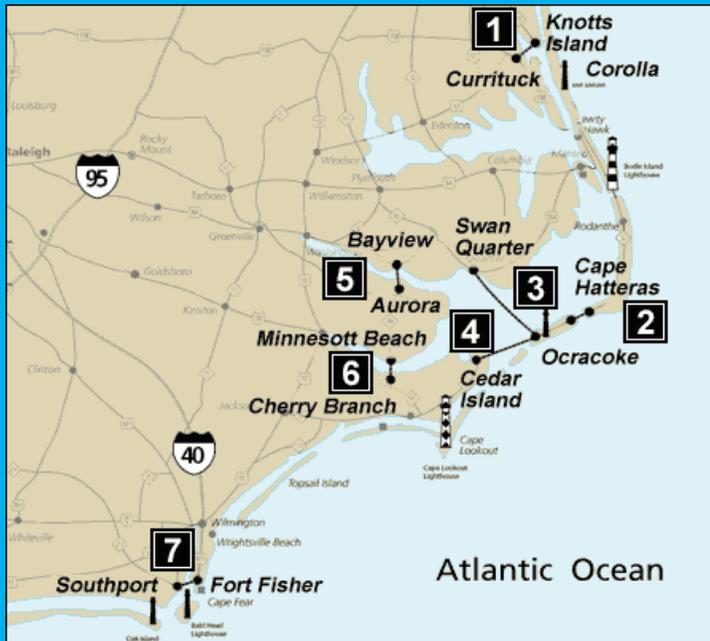
**When I got his autograph, I told Vonta Leach that I lived near San Francisco but that I was originally from Hamlet, N.C. He knew where Hamlet is, not only because Rowland is not far away, but also because Ravens teammate Dannelle Ellerbe is from Hamlet.**



**We took the state ferry from Fort Fisher across the Cape Fear River to Southport. Then we took a passenger-only resort ferry from Southport to Bald Head Island.**

**Fort Fisher occupied the narrow strip of land that separated the Atlantic from the Cape Fear River in the Civil War and protected Wilmington, the South's last major Atlantic port. In the movie *Lincoln*, the fall of the fort was a huge concern. In the winter of 1864-65, Union troops from 85 ships conducted the two largest amphibious landings before World War II and succeeded in taking the fort. Wilmington fell a month later, and the South surrendered three months after that.**





## North Carolina ferry system

North Carolina's state ferry system consists of 21 vessels that provide transportation to and from the Outer Banks across Pamlico and Currituck sounds, across inlets between the Outer Banks, and across the Pamlico, Neuse and Cape Fear Rivers. It is the second largest state ferry system in the nation after the Washington State Ferries. Each ferry is named and also carries the seal and colors of a college or university in North Carolina. Some ferries are free, others require a fare. The shortest crossing is 20 minutes across the Neuse River and the longest is 2 hours 30 minutes across Pamlico Sound between Swan Quarter on the mainland and Ocracoke on the Outer Banks. The fleet is maintained in the state shipyard at Manns Harbor on Croatan Sound.

### Hatteras Class

Ferry	School	Description
Ocracoke	N.C. Central University	 <p><b>Ocracoke</b> 26 vehicles, 149 passengers</p>
Cape Point	N.C. A&T State University	
Thomas Baum	N.C. State University	
Roanoke	Meredith College	
Frisco	Appalachian State University	
Kinnakeet	Elizabeth City State University	
Chicamacomico	UNC-Asheville	

### River Class

Croatoan	Methodist University	 <p><b>Gov. James B. Hunt</b> 38 vehicles, 300 passengers</p>
Gov. Daniel Russell	Gardner-Webb University	
Southport	Duke University	
Neuse	Wake Forest University	
Floyd Lupton	UNC-Pembroke	
Fort Fisher	UNC-Wilmington	
Stanford White	Winston-Salem State University	
Gov. James B. Hunt	UNC-Greensboro	
Hatteras	Shaw University	

### Sound Class

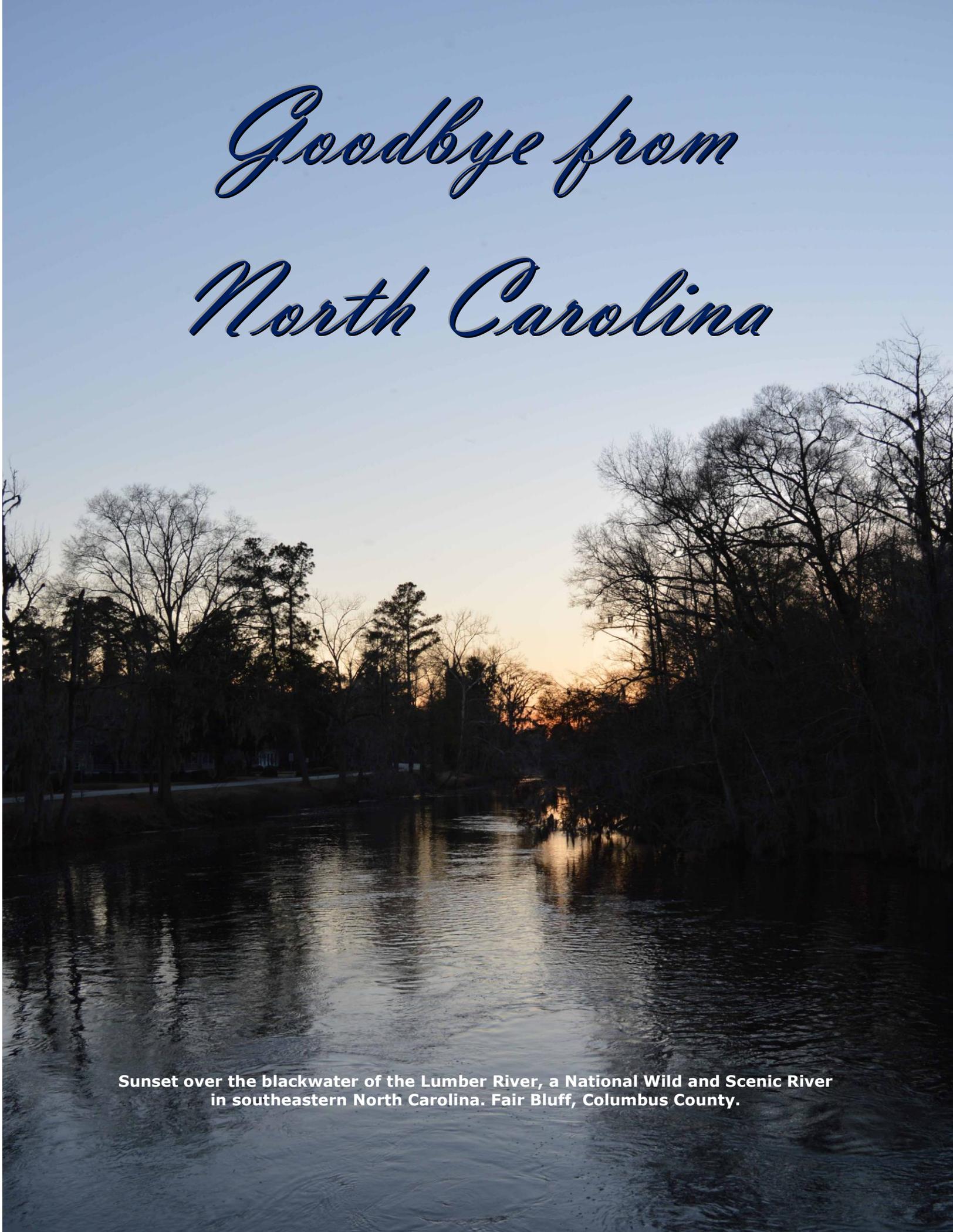
Carteret	UNC-Chapel Hill	 <p><b>Silver Lake</b> 46-50 vehicles, 300 passengers</p>
Cedar Island	East Carolina University	
Silver Lake	UNC-Charlotte	
Pamlico	N.C. School of the Arts	
Swan Quarter	Elon University	



**The beach at Fort Fisher, looking south toward Cape Fear.**

**Bald Head Lighthouse – Old Baldy – was North Carolina’s first lighthouse and was built in 1817. It marked the treacherous Cape Fear and the entrance to the river of the same name that led to the port of Wilmington 29 miles upstream.**





*Goodbye from  
North Carolina*

**Sunset over the blackwater of the Lumber River, a National Wild and Scenic River in southeastern North Carolina. Fair Bluff, Columbus County.**