

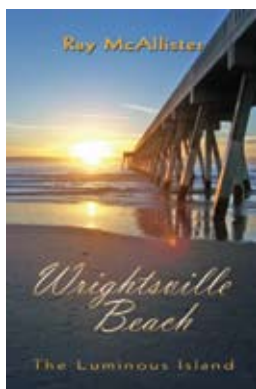
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New Book Captures the Magic of *Wrightsville Beach: The Luminous Island*

By Ray McAllister



Say it's a summer day without a cloud in the sky. Say it's a holiday, either Memorial Day or the Fourth of July or Labor Day. Say it's Saturday, the first day of a long weekend.

Say you have nothing better to do than sit all day on the only bridge that connects Wrightsville Beach to the North Carolina mainland.

By the time the day is done, more than 100,000 cars will have passed you, and all of them will have gone the same way.

In his new book, *Wrightsville Beach: The Luminous Island*, journalist Ray McAllister tries to explain why Wrightsville exerts such an attraction on so many people.

"There's something about this magical bit of coastline," McAllister writes. "Everyone finds something. Indians, pirates, and blockade runners once worked it of necessity. Boaters, fishermen, swimmers, and divers followed by choice. . . . Families have played here on the beach for well over a century, brought first by trains, then beach trolleys, now cars."

In his search for an answer, McAllister looks to Wrightsville's past as well as its present. He writes about the pirates who may have buried treasure on nearby Money Island, and about the treasure seekers who have searched for it ever since. He writes about the Confederate blockade runners who used the surrounding channels and inlets to slip past the Union navy, and about the famous Blockade Runner Resort. He writes about the Big Storm of 1899, the Great Fire of 1934, and Hurricane Hazel. He writes about the late, lamented Lumina Pavilion and the still-thriving Johnnie Mercer's Fishing Pier. He writes about a

hurricane called Hazel and a whale called Trouble.

He also talks to people like Brian Bailey, who first came to Wrightsville with his parents and now brings his own child. McAllister meets a woman who uses a weekend at Wrightsville to recover emotionally from the death of her mother and the hospitalization of her father. He interviews former *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker, who vacationed on Wrightsville as a young boy during the Depression.

He talks to those tasked with maintaining Wrightsville's beach against the forces of time and erosion. He hears out both sides of the debate over beach nourishment and shoreline development.

"Wrightsville has gone from a lonely outpost to an island of small summer cottages to a paradise for real-estate investors," McAllister writes. "The island has been battered by ungodly storms, unholy fires, and undeterred developers. Only the surf and the shifting sands of the beach have survived them all.

"What a story this old beach town has!"

Ray McAllister lives in Richmond, where he is a columnist for the Richmond Times-Dispatch, but since his parents live in Wilmington, he has visited Wrightsville Beach for many years. He is also the author of Topsail Island: Mayberry by the Sea.

Wrightsville Beach: The Luminous Island

Ray McAllister

July 2007 • History

5 x 8 • 243 pages

Paperback • \$13.95 • 978-0-89587-348-4

Hardcover • \$19.95 • 978-0-89587-347-7