



**Downtown prior to the Riverwalk. The parking deck was built in the late 1960s, and torn down in recent years.** [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]



**Looking south along the Wilmington main riverfront today. The area north of here will be home to a new waterfront park and a large, outdoor concert venue.** [KEN BLEVINS/STARNEWS]



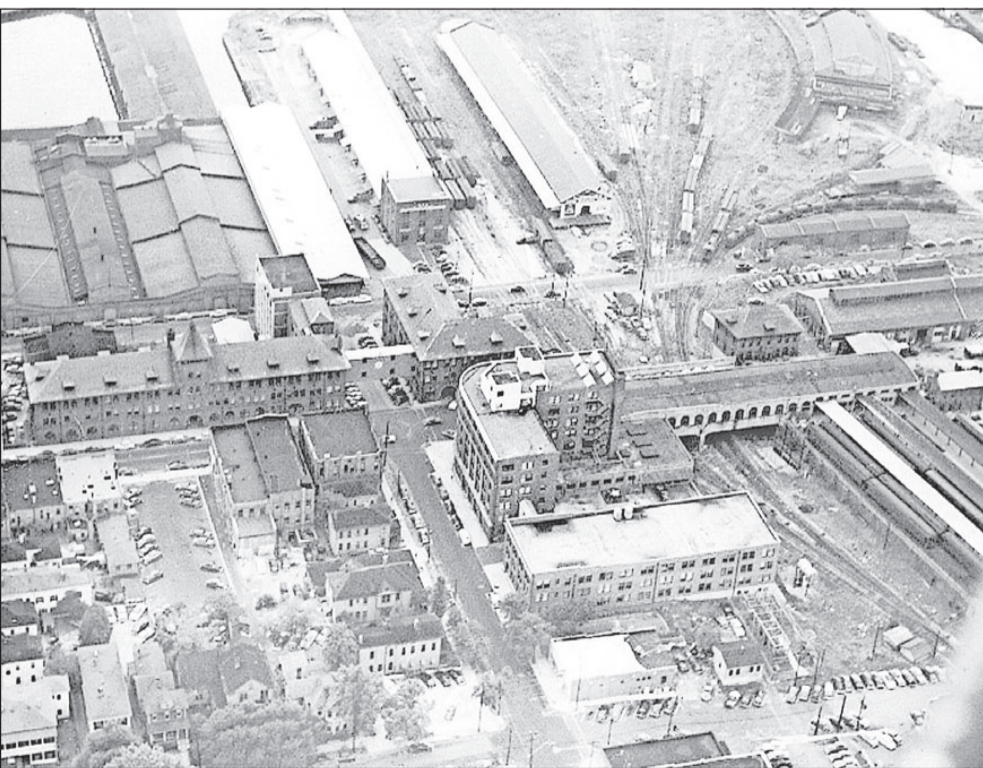
**Union Station stood for years at Front and Red Cross streets and was the city's main train station.** [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]



**The old Union Station building, at Front and Red Cross streets, was demolished July 11, 1970.** [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]



**Built on the site of the old train station, Cape Fear Community College's Union Station pays tribute to its namesake's unique architecture. It opened in 2013 at Front and Red Cross streets.** [STARNEWS FILE]



**Union Station, at Front and Red Cross streets, is seen in this view looking toward the river. A concourse connects the station to the boarding platforms. The building on Red Cross Street seen connected to Union Station for many years was Wilmington Police headquarters.** [CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS]



**After Belk left downtown in the late 1970s, the building was modified to become home to the New Hanover County public library.** [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]

## DARE

From Page C4

Our strategy gained the attention of Mary Means, a national leader in such work. As vice president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Means drew on the work of DARE to create the National Main Street program, which has helped 2,000 communities revive

older town centers. Instead of the strip clubs, adult bookstores, deteriorating buildings, departing businesses and a future that was going to include towering mounds of dirty coal, we have a national-award-winning riverfront and a vibrant downtown, home to an increasingly varied lineup of businesses and thousands of residents. As this story documents, it took the hard

work and determination of many people with one thing in common: A belief that the best way forward for downtown was to preserve its history and to protect and reconnect with its greatest asset – the Cape Fear River. I am thankful I had the opportunity to help shape that vision through DARE, Inc., and to witness the revival of downtown Wilmington, an evolution that continues to this day.

It is an accomplishment we should not take for granted. In future articles, I will explore the progress – and challenges – of downtown since 1982. Gene Merritt is a long-time local developer and historic preservationist. He was co-founder and first executive director of DARE, Inc., now known as Wilmington Downtown Inc.