

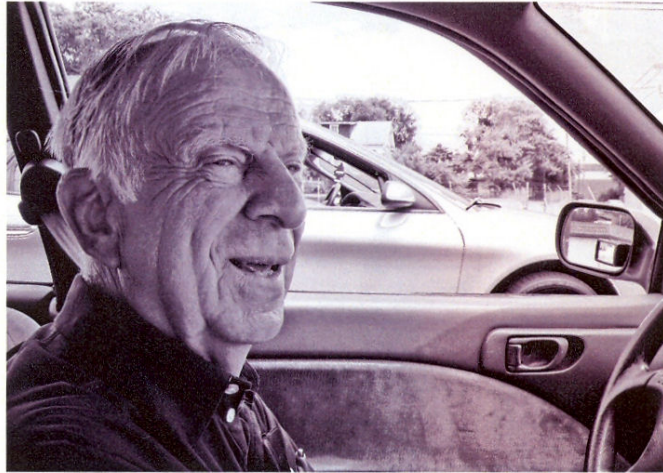
By George, he knows it!

A car ride through Roanoke with local historian George Kegley is like getting a personal guided tour of the Star City's history, and a one-man comedy show all rolled into one. Roanoke's 2002 Citizen of the Year, Kegley is a board member and past president of the Historical Society of Western Virginia and the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation. He also volunteers for the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, the group that administers Historic Jamestowne with the National Park Service.

Kegley is also the retired business editor of *The Roanoke Times* and a trustee at the Western Virginia Land Trust, where I work as project manager. I took a ride with Kegley through his stomping grounds in northeast Roanoke recently. Here are some of the highlights of that driving tour:

It had such high hopes: Kegley tells the story of Peyton Terry as we pass by Elmwood Park, which got its name from Terry's former home on top of the hill. Terry was the first president of Roanoke Gas Company and was known to some as "Roanoke's first billionaire."

"He had the Terry building on the southeast corner of Jefferson and Campbell," Kegley says. "It was Roanoke's first skyscraper — eight stories."



George Kegley. The former *Roanoke Times* business editor says he hasn't read "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek," but wonders if a letter addressed to Annie Dillard that he received might count for something.

Wrong address: As we drive past Old Monterey Golf Course, Kegley points out a house called Belmont situated on the edge of the course.

"There's a marker on the house that says William Fleming lived there," he says.

"But he didn't?" I asked.

"Well, Fleming died in 1795, and the house was built in 1830." That settles that.

Don't spoil the ending: Still at Monterey, Kegley points to a wooded hill on the course where he says Fleming is buried.

"When we first moved out here 35 years ago, it was at Easter, and the Baptist church right here had a living history, kind of a reenactment," he says. "They reenacted the crucifixion on Good Friday. They said, 'Come back on Sunday morning and see what happens.'"

I read the Cliffs Notes: I ask Kegley if he has ever read "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek," the famous book about life on the creek that runs past his house.

"No, but we once got a letter addressed to Annie Dillard," he says.

That must count for something.

Don't let the name fool you: Kegley drives me up to the aptly named "Tombstone Cemetery" on Plantation Road. There we find a motorcycle-themed marker on the grave of one Jerry Dale Eller, aka "Squirrel," with the inscription, "Squirrel: A true bro who rode hard and died young." Underneath is the "1%" logo signifying an outlaw biker.

It's hard to image that Squirrel tolerated any teasing over his *nom de guerre*.

—David Perry

