

## McGillin's Prologue

It was an exciting time to be an American, especially in Philadelphia. The air fairly crackled with anticipation, and every day brought news and stirred gossip that gave shape to the events to come. The U.S. Patent Office buzzed with a not unexpected increase in requests to register and protect new ideas and designs to commemorate (and profit from) the occasion. Businessmen and laborers alike crowded smoke-filled taverns where every conversation carried the common thread of the topic on everyone's mind. Back home, their wives dug into blanket chests and rustled through linen closets to find the cherished flag and tri-color bunting that would soon mark the patriotic fervor of every home and place of business.



The Bell in Hand Door Pull

Indeed, springtime in the City of Brotherly Love was an exciting place to be in the year of our Lord 1875. The light was dim and the air redolent of pipe and cigar smoke, just the way the patrons liked it in the Bell in Hand Ale House. The barkeep, William McGillin, less portly and more taciturn than the average barkeep, carried four foam-crested pewter steins to the end of the bar where his regulars, the Corner Gang, always congregated. The argument had started up again, regular as clockwork these days, it seemed.

"It's 1876, I tell you. Any fool who knows how to add and subtract will tell you that," fumed one customer.



William McGillin

"Nonsense! It's an anniversary celebration, not just another birthday of some snot-nosed brat. Anyone with a jot of sense knows that our hundredth year starts on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1875."

McGillin shrugged, resigned to another round in the never-ending clash between the mathematically and the philosophically inclined. He knew that the good citizens of Philadelphia would start celebrating this coming July 4<sup>th</sup> and not stop until the great Philadelphia Exhibition in Fairmount Park ended the following year. He smiled inwardly as he contemplated the brisk trade that the entire year and more would bring. Yes, the Centennial would be good for business from July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1875, until the end of 1876!

*(The Bell in Hand Ale House opened for business in 1860 at 1308 Drury Street in Philadelphia. William McGillin lived upstairs in with his wife and 13 children. William died in 1901, and his wife operated the tavern until 1907, when she sold to new owners, who expanded it to its present location of 1306-1310 Drury Street and renamed it McGillin's Old Ale House. It remains open to this day, and is the fifth oldest tavern in continuous operation in America.)*

