



The location of the Golden Fleece Hotel in the Port Richmond neighborhood of Philadelphia, as shown on the 1862 Smedley atlas of Philadelphia. *Courtesy of the Map Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.*

THE GOLDEN FLEECE HOTEL

a checkered history

Within only a few years of opening the Golden Fleece, William Gould and his hotel found themselves in the press when members of the notorious Schuylkill Rangers gang executed a one-night burglary spree in Richmond. They ransacked several nearby stores, but when they got to the Golden Fleece, they awoke the Goulds' dog and ran off.¹ Unfortunately, William Gould was not always on the right side of the law, as evidenced in an incident several months before when an argument with a man on a trolley came to blows in the street.²

After Gould gave up direct management of the Fleece, William Nugent ran the establishment for about six years, during which time a dog allegedly came to the hotel's defense again. In June 1876, several men—including former city councilman Daniel Gilbert—were returning from a political rally when, perhaps already having enjoyed

libations, they decided they were thirsty and made for the hotel. As it was four in the morning, they found the tavern closed and its proprietor asleep. Rattling the gate to wake him, they drew the attention of Nugent's dog, which snarled at the group. As a drowsy Nugent opened the door to allow them in, he watched Gilbert produce a pistol and shoot at the dog. However, not only did he miss the canine, his shot struck a lamplighter. Though initially feared to be serious, the bullet failed to break the man's skin and Gilbert was simply fined \$5.³

Anthony Keefe, who had married William Gould's daughter Elizabeth, took over the Golden Fleece in 1878. Keefe's tenure seems to have been relatively uneventful, though at some point he lost his liquor license and was subsequently indicted for selling without one. During this time, the hotel seems to have transformed into a rentable hall, the management of which James N. Makin took over in 1889. Within four years, Thomas Gould sold Makin the portion of the property containing the Fleece, while retaining the portion with houses along Clearfield Street. Two years later, Makin obtained a liquor license for the Golden Fleece, starting a new chapter for the establishment.⁴

- Samuel A. Pickard