

# City Beat

*There are eight million stories in my albums. This is one of them...*

Along with hotels, private clubs were key fixtures of Philadelphia's old North Broad Street social life. Since many North Broad Street residents were excluded from older establishments, they set up their own clubs that were just as grand as their Center City counterparts. The most imposing of the North Broad Street clubs was the Mercantile Club, built in 1892, once located at the intersection of North Broad and Jefferson Streets. The membership consisted primarily of German Jewish families such as the Gimbels and the Snellenburgs (owners of big Center City department stores), as well as prominent attorneys and professionals. The luxurious facility boasted public spaces such as a Turkish smoking room. Oddly enough, the Mercantile Club was reluctant to admit Jews of non-German ancestry until the 1920s. Albert Greenfield, an immigrant from the Ukraine and the largest real estate operator in the city, was nearly blackballed.

Later known as the Compton Building, the Mercantile Club fell in the early 1970s for the current surface lot. [<http://preservationresearch.com/downtown/lost-the-mercantile-club/>]

The exuberant Gilded Age grandeur (or swagger) of North Broad Street proved all too fleeting. Today, almost all of North Broad Street's social and residential gems have fallen to the wrecker's ball. A few remnants of past glory – a score of crumbling rowhouses, a rotting old hotel, and a few heavily altered mansions – remind passersby of a time when North Broad Street was the street of dreams of Philadelphia's Gilded Age.

[<https://www.phillyhistory.org/blog/index.php/2010/06/the-lost-world-of-north-broad-street/>]

*Mercantile Club*

