

Founded by Women Artists, Plastic Club Installs Historical Marker on 125th Anniversary

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

On May 21, the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Plastic Club, a Pennsylvania Historical Marker was installed on the street outside the club at 247 South Camac Street. In 1897, when women were not eligible for membership in Philadelphia's prestigious art clubs, Emily Sartain, Director of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (now Moore College of Art), and Alice Barber Stephens, an instructor at the school, founded the club for the purpose of bringing together experienced, successful women artists and younger women just beginning their artistic careers. ("Plastic" refers to the malleable state of any unfinished work of art.)

In addition to painters and graphic artists, club members included photographers, sculptors, bookbinders, stained-glass makers, jewelry designers, muralists, printmakers, needleworkers, lace makers, book illustrators, and a puppeteer. The Plastic Club exhibited members' work twice a year; held exhibitions and lectures; advertised their programs with posters created by the members; provided members with art classes, workshops and courses in French; and assembled an art library. Works by many of the early club members are held in public, private and museum collections. Quite a few of them appeared in the recent exhibition, "Women in Motion," at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

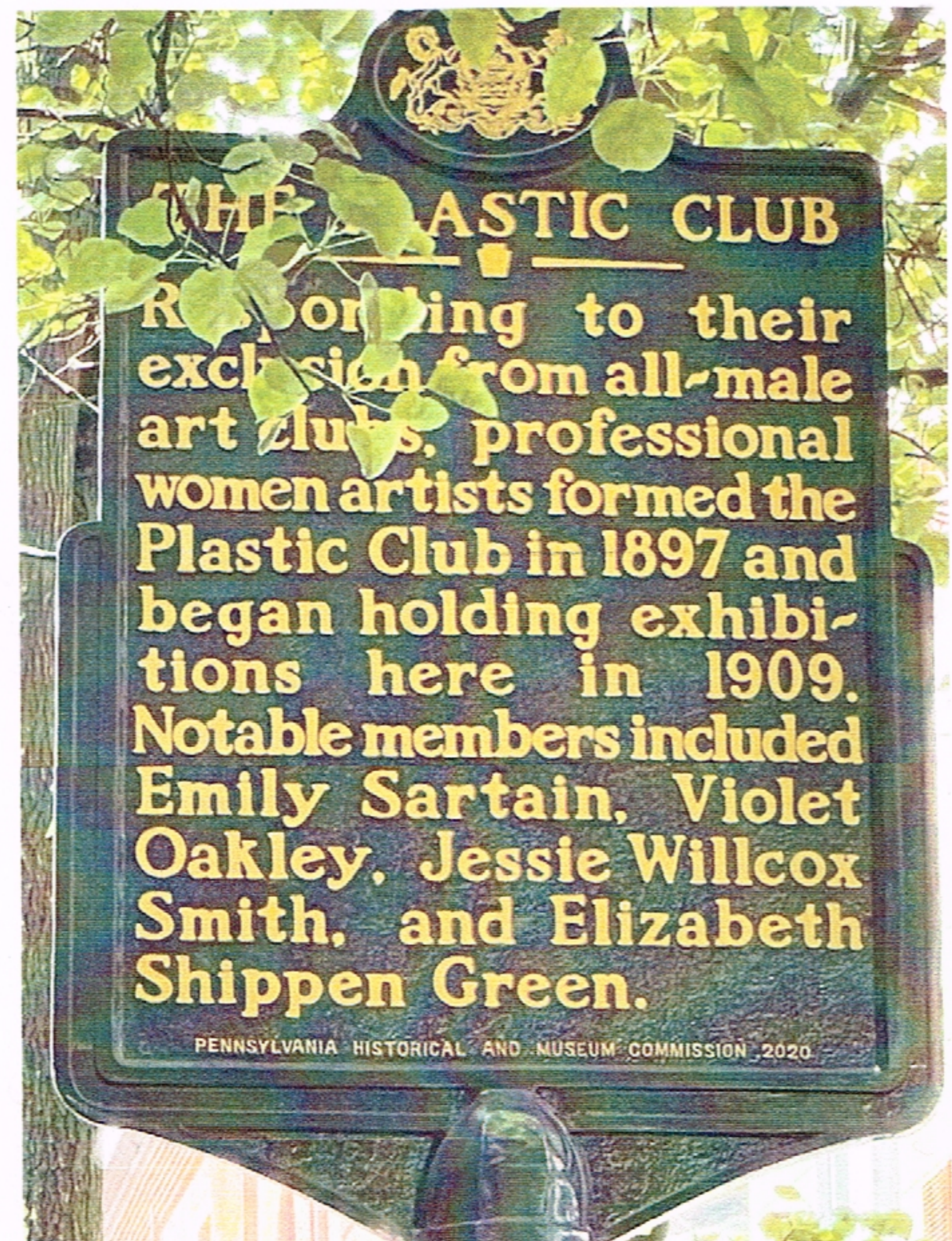


Nancy Moses, Chairperson, Pennsylvania Historical Museum, author of books about art museums and cultural artifacts.

During its first decade, the Plastic Club met in rented rooms at 10 South 18th Street. Initially, 57 women formed the club, and one year later there were 125 members. Within 10 years, membership reached 260. In 1909, the Club purchased their current headquarters—two combined rowhouses on Camac Street—which was placed on the Philadelphia Historic Register in 1962. Men were allowed to join in 1991, 94 years after the club opened.

At the installation of the historic marker, Patricia Likos Ricci, Professor of the History of Art, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA, delivered an address on the Plastic Club's history. Other speakers included: Nancy Moses, Chairperson, Pennsylvania Historical Museum, and author of books about art museums and cultural artifacts; Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner; Councilmember Mark Squilla; and current Plastic Club President Susan Ploeg.

The Plastic Club holds several exhibitions each year, open to the public. Current members have continued the tradition of seeing their works acquired by museums and private collectors. For more information about the Plastic Club exhibitions and history see: <https://www.plasticclub.org/>



New marker outside The Plastic Club on Camac Street.