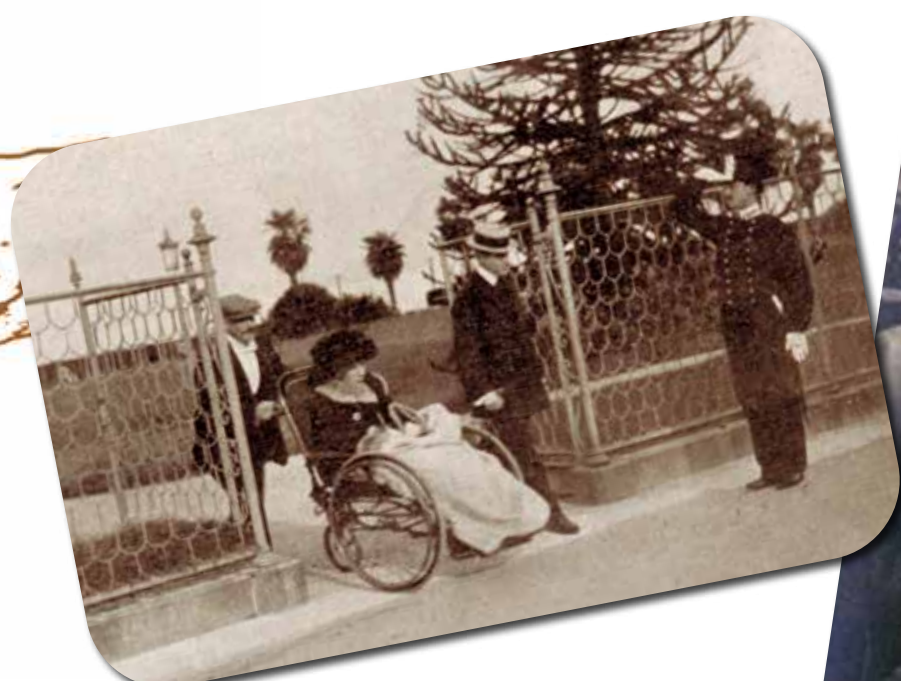
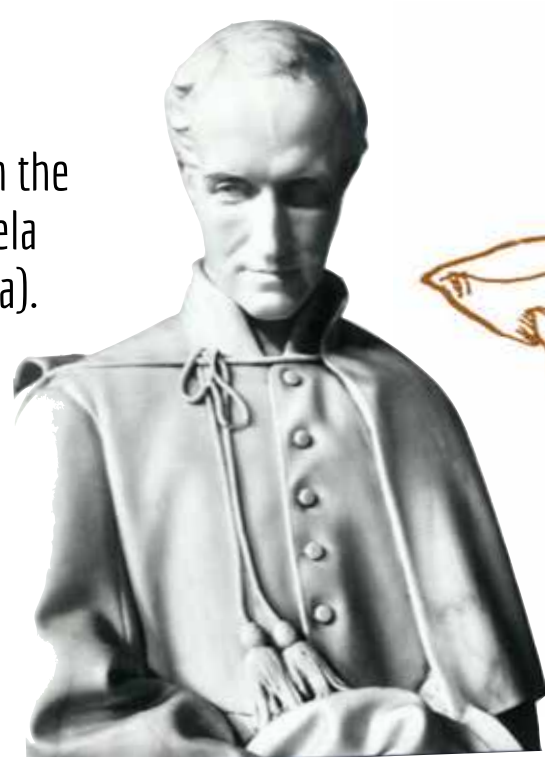


A sinistra: Anna Maria Bolongaro.
Right: Antonio Rosmini depicted in the
funerary monument by Vincenzo Vela
(Church of SS. Crocifisso, Stresa).



Stories & Gardens of Stresa's Oldest Residence

An exquisite fresco preserved in a ground-floor room indicates 1771 as the year of completion for the construction of the first grand residence (named "Casa d'Oro") built in Stresa, on the lake shore. Originally the home of the Bolongaro family, known for their generosity to fellow citizens and hospitality to all, it later became, through the testamentary bequest of Anna Maria Bolongaro (1782-1848), the residence of Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), a priest and philosopher of vast culture. From 1857 to 1912, it served as the villa of Elisabeth of Saxony, Duchess of Genoa (1830-1912), sister-in-law to Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoy. The purchase occurred when the noblewoman, a young widow of the king's brother, remarried the Marquis Nicolò Rappallo, a union not well received at court. Like the villa's previous owners, the duchess remained beloved by the people of Stresa for her intellectual pursuits, love of books, art, and music, and her support of cultural, social, and sports activities. She transformed her vacation residence into a regal abode, resplendent in its architecture and gardens.

During Anna Maria Bolongaro's time, plants and flowers adorned the lake-facing facade, while a large "Italian" garden, characterized by symmetrical paths, flowerbeds, and plants, stretched towards the mountains. This was the state of the property when the Duchess acquired it in 1857. In Antonio Rosmini's era, Ruggiero Bonghi, who witnessed the dialogues between the priest and Alessandro Manzoni at the villa, documented in *Stresiane* the writer's enthusiasm for the plants and mentioned various trees (a cypress, a laurel, a strawberry tree, etc.) "before which we passed to sit in the small grove formed by these and many others, along with camellias, magnolias, rhododendrons, and hydrangeas." Thus, the garden already contained exotic plants, destined to increase in the following years.

With the Duchess of Genoa, the gardens were expanded following a concession from the municipality of a stretch of shoreline, and the variety of plants increased, partly transported from the Savoy castle of Agliè. Under the care of expert gardeners, the flowerbeds, trees, and groves became increasingly lush.

In front of the villa (since 1966 the seat of the International Center for Rosminian Studies) stood two majestic cedars, which, unfortunately, are no longer there. A centuries-old Magnolia grandiflora remains in the garden, a majestic witness to many life episodes.



Above: Garden facing the lake.



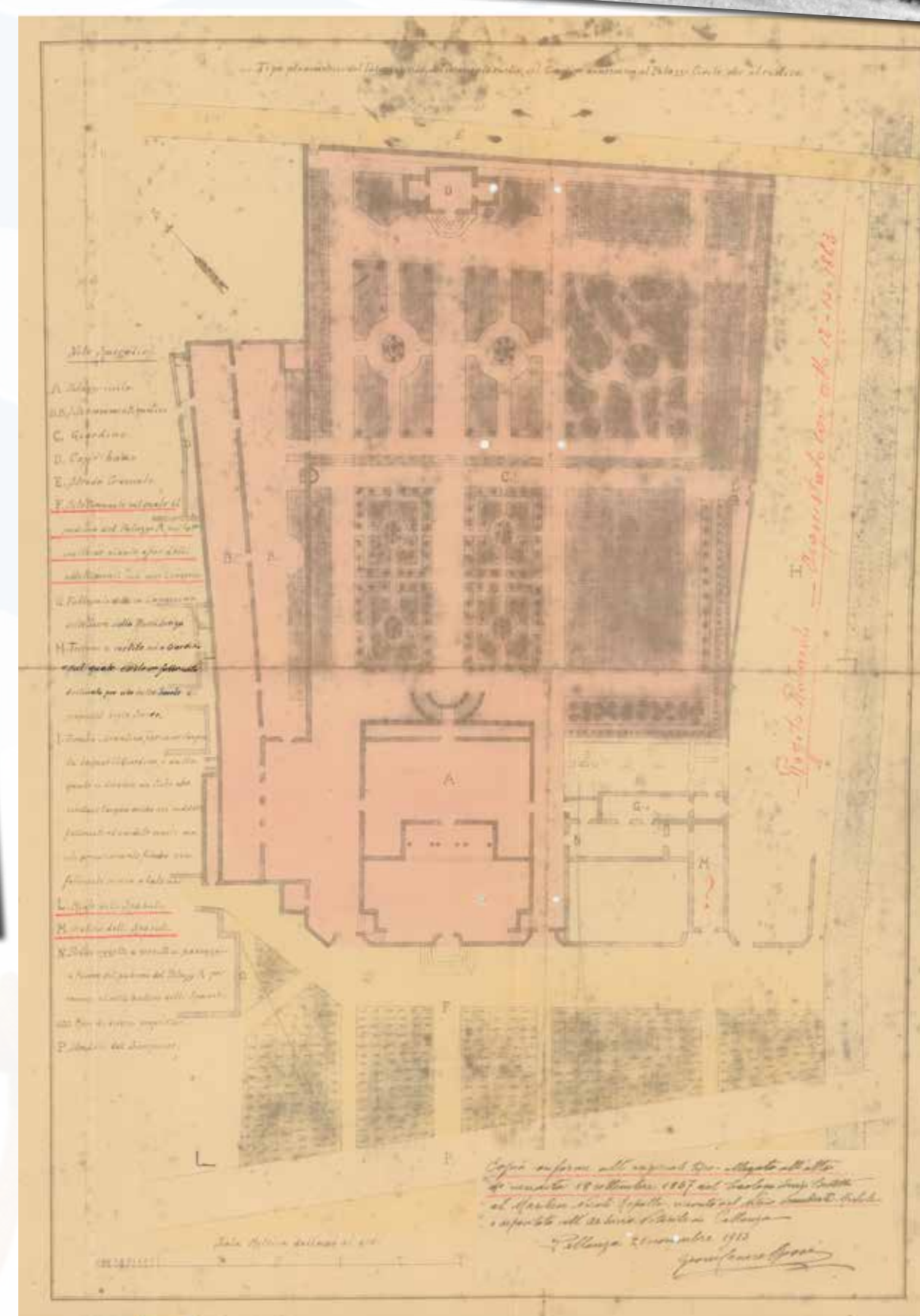
Center: Gardens in front of the villas.



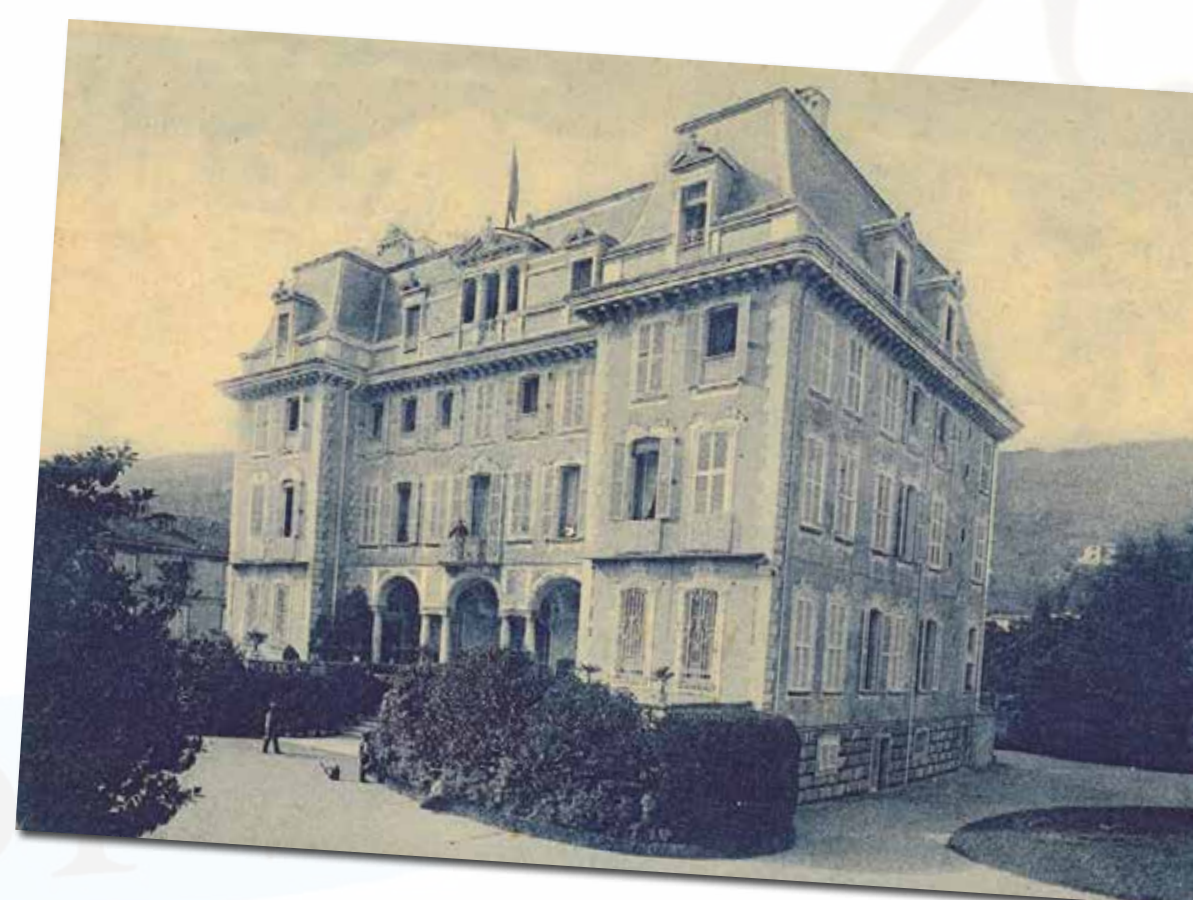
Below: The mountain-facing front with the gardens.



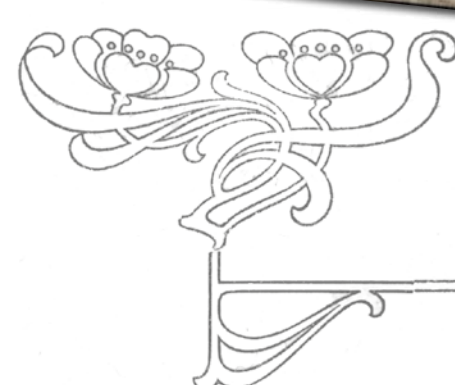
Images of Villa Ducale and the building erected after 1864 for Prince Thomas.



Above: Plan of the villa and park in the deed of purchase dated September 18, 1857.



From top to bottom: Sequence of architectural phases and the creation of the gardens of Casa Bolongaro - Villa Ducale.



English

