

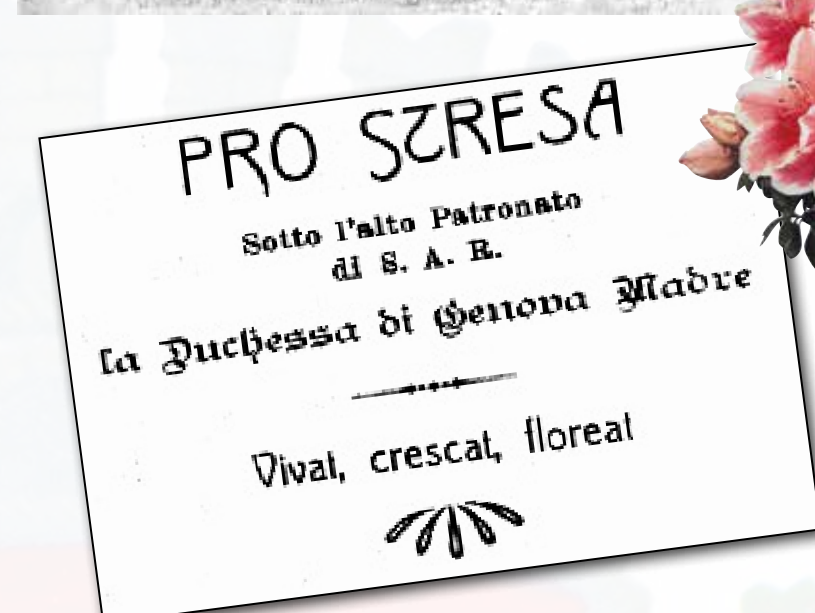


## Pro Stresa and Pro Flora et Pomona

Since the second half of the 19th century, the increasing construction of villas and hotels surrounded by parks and gardens around Lake Maggiore has fostered the growth of horticultural, nursery, and gardening businesses and the creation of events showcasing all kinds of flowers and plants. This phenomenon had significant economic and tourist impacts, supported by local societies promoting exhibitions and competitions.

A successful era began in 1870 with the Agricultural-Industrial-Artistic Exhibition in Pallanza, inaugurated in the presence of the Duchess of Genoa (mother of the future Queen Margherita) and her son Tommaso, notable vacationers in Stresa. Competitors from the entire region participated in various categories; "Horticulture and Floriculture" were part of class 23, as noted in the catalog, which lists the exhibited products and participants' names, including Antonio Cantamessa from Stresa. In 1877, the Società Orticola Verbanese was founded in Pallanza, and it remains active to this day: its members, including those from Stresa, have enlivened national and international events, such as floriculture conventions.

From 1899 to 1929, the activities of "Pro Stresa" were highly fruitful. The society was established to improve the local conditions, make the area more appealing to visitors, and promote various events, such as the 1902 Congress of Gardeners and Horticulturists. Another jewel of Stresa was the "Pro Flora et Pomona" (named after the Roman goddesses of fertility and fruit), founded in January 1914 to promote horticulture, fruit growing, and gardening. The society organized a picturesque and popular competition for professionals and amateurs, the "Flower Parade," which awarded prizes for the best-decorated cars, carriages, motorcycles, bicycles, and more that paraded along the lakefront. Though not unique to Stresa, these events were an unmissable part of September for several years. Stresa also hosted smaller competitions. The August 1910 issue of the magazine "Verbania" announced the following program: "September 8: Exhibition of plants and flowers. 9: Flower pairing competition. 10: Table decoration competition. 11: Table fruit competition." Each event was an opportunity to celebrate natural beauty and human creativity.



Right: An article from "Verbania," 1909.



Right: The children of Regina Palace Hotel owner Bernardo Bossi on two small flower-decorated carriages for the "Flower Parades."



Right and below: Bicycles, automobiles, and carriages adorned with lake flowers during the annual competitions.



Among the leaders and presidents of the "Pro Flora et Pomona" society were notable gardeners and floriculturists: Michele Cantamessa and Rinaldo Ronchi, entrepreneurs in Stresa, and Alessandro Pirotta, head gardener on Isola Bella.

