

The Rocca Saporiti Complex

The Rocca Saporiti complex of buildings was named after its previous owner. It was the renovated country home and shooting lodge of the Ancini family that had acquired a fortified medieval tower and the land on which it stood in 1498.

Its location would seem to follow all the precepts of a country home as it was outside city limits, but not too far, and near a river with a view of the mountains. These precepts were based on concepts dating to Plinius and Vitruvius that were revived during the humanist period and support the "otium agreste" as a way to relieve the pressures of urban and political life.

The complex we see today is the result of various phases of building that ended around the middle of the 17th c that gradually transformed a modest country home into a country residence. (Cf. assumed phases of development at the bottom of the page).

Prestige was brought to the estate by the sojourn of his Eminence Cardinal Rinaldo I of Este, Reggio's bishop from 1651 to 1660, who ordered the construction of the stairway we see today on the outside the building that cuts across the open gallery.

In 1859, Enrichetta Ancini willed the Palazzo to Luigi Ancini, the first mayor of Reggio Emilia. The political atmosphere following the unification of Italy was not one to support luxury homes for the rich because this would have been in opposition to Napoleon's edicts against the aristocracy and his reiterated praise of the bourgeoisie. In 1885, Giovanni Ancini, son of the mayor Luigi Ancini willed the entire estate, except for the picture gallery, family archives and library, to a charitable Congregation. The Institution graciously accepted this generous bequest but did nothing with it for the first 6 years. Finally, in 1891, the shooting lodge and surrounding park were rented to Count Luigi Rati Opizzoni who continued to live there until 1904 when the property was sold to Count Alessandro Rocca Saporiti who later sold it to the Marquis Ippolito Gropallo Rocca Saporiti who in turn sold it to the Charitable Congregation in 1929.

The Congregation had decided to once again became the owners of this property, now called Rocca Saporiti, because it seemed an ideal setting for tuberculosis patients. The Marquis Gropallo Rocca Saporiti had no heirs and, on November 22, 1928, generously sold the complex to the Charitable Congregation for the modest price of 1,400,000.00 Italian lire. The Charitable Congregation had at this point become the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova and by the time the sale was concluded, had decided not to use it for tuberculosis patients. The project was criticized for fear that a sanatorium with an entrance facing south would have polluted the city's air and water supply and that it was much better to use the San Lazzaro Institute building for this purpose.

For many years the shooting lodge was largely ignored, the ground floor being used by The San Pellegrino Elementary School until the building was divided up into small apartments for the poorer working classes and then slowly fell to ruin over the years. Finally, in 1970, the regional Office for the Protection of Monuments and Fine Arts made a provision for the conservation of the Rocca Saporiti complex that has led to its present state of restoration. Research then began on the buildings and on the frescoes found in the hunting lodge that have been attributed to Orazio Perucci and collaborators. The frescoes may have been executed after the sojourn in Reggio Emilia of Bernardino Campi around 1590 and the frescoes found in the "*sala cubica*" (the main hall) were probably commissioned in honor of the marriage of Girolamo Ancini and Ginevra Patrini.

Source: **Palazzo Rocca Saporiti: storia, arte, architettura** (Palazzo Rocca Saporiti: its history, art, and architecture) edited by Giorgio Adelmo and Francesca Vezzali. Reggio Emilia, Technograf Publishers Ltd., 1999.