

## **1) A BRIEF HISTORY OF CASLINO D'ERBA**

The history of the Municipality of Caslino d'Erba is inextricably linked to the history of the Pecori Palace.

Caslino d'Erba is a little village near Como, surrounded by mountains.

It has very ancient origins. It preserves evidence from the Roman, barbarian, medieval, and Renaissance periods.

According to the local historian Iganziò Cantù, the first inhabitants of the area were the Orobi (founders of the cities of Barra, Como, and Bergamo), then around 600 BC, the Gauls, a Celtic people from France, settled there, and perhaps this was the period of the actual foundation of the town.

The particular rootedness of goat breeding and the quality of goat milk cheeses for which Caslino is famous, could be as old as the town itself: it is known that the Celtic populations wore clothes of goat skin and wool and produced excellent cheese.

And could we not then get to the Romans, conquerors of the world?

Even though little is known about the life of Caslino in the Roman era: it must have had some importance if we think of the strategic position of the oldest Caslino, located near San Calocero, which could have been the site of a Roman colony and also of a castle or walled enclosure or castrum of which something can still be glimpsed in the land of Capiria near San Calocero.

From the Roman Era, Caslino, like many towns in the Vallassina and Piano d'Erba, bears numerous testimonies.

Even today, some valleys and woods in its territory bear Roman names:

- To the west of the town, beyond the Mournée bridge, along the road towards San Salvatore, a valley opens up that ancient parish archives called Val di Giano;

- There is also a farm once called "Al Mercurio" and today called "Al Mercul".

Giano and Mercurio, two Roman gods who protected agriculture and pastoralism, were therefore venerated in these areas.

- On the road leading to Monte Palanzone, after the Cappelletta dei Monti, there is a place called Midria: God victor over demons and tyrants, who often being confused with the sun, he was worshipped by all.

Then came the time of the barbarian invasions: the first were the Lombards who stayed there for over 200 years, leaving traces in all the towns of Brianza in the language, customs and the memory of Theodelinda, queen of the Lombards.

The Franks were called to fight the Lombard power with Charlemagne, who in 774 defeated King Desiderius, the last king of the Lombards.

There were then triple invasions of the Hungarians who, descending from the Alps, brought terror and devastation everywhere. To protect themselves from the massacres and violence committed by this fierce people, the need arose to erect forts and castles where they could take refuge and defend themselves.

In fact, almost all the towers and castles we find in the area date back to this period.

Meanwhile, in this part of our history, we have arrived in the midst of the feudal period.

In Milan, feudal authority was divided between the counts, whose jurisdiction was the rural county.

The oldest is that of Martesana which included the parishes of Asso, Incino (which also included Caslino), Galliano, Oggiono, Garlate and others.

During this period, the existing towers and forts were strengthened and others were built.

In Caslino, there was an ancient tower, just as it is thought that a castle or fort had been rebuilt on the Roman ruins in the area adjacent to Capiria, near San Calocero. Minor Castellino and Major Castellino. But we were saying that after the year one thousand, according to the ordinary dynamics of the Milanese, the territory was incorporated into a parish, specifically the Parish of Incino, within which in 1346, under the domination of the Visconti, the Team from Canzo was formed, which included a group of small communities gathered for electoral purposes, which in 1403 will constitute the Court of Casale, which has Canzo as its capital and of which Caslino was part and was free and independent, without servitude or vassalage. But the problems they were there, history was lurking, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa descended from the Alps, who laid siege to Milan, and since the Martesana was tied to the Milanese, he devastated their lands. Every place was put to the sword and fire and the poor populations had to fall victim or seek escape on the mountains or in the caves (one of these is the Buco del Piombo, a refuge for the inhabitants of Erba and Caslino). The Martesani quickly became allies of Barbarossa, only to return to Milanese territory (year 1168), after the latter's defeat. Thus, all the municipalities of the Pieve d'Incino were enfeoffed during the Lordship of the Visconti and then to the Sforza. In 1450, Francesco Sforza was proclaimed Duke and on July 15, 1472, Galeazzo Maria Sforza (son of Francesco Sforza) granted the court of Casal to Antonio and Damiano Negroni, known as "the Missaglia" armorers, whose lineage died out in the 17th century, when Count Marco Antonio Missaglia, childless, left his possessions to his two sisters.

Obviously, the events of which the country has been a protagonist do not end here. The people of Caslino had to face the Spanish Dominion. And if at first they were spared, later between 1527 and 1531 they had to deal with the raids of the bands of Gian Giacomo de Medici, known as Medeghino, Castellan of Musso, who after killing Astore Visconti, fled from Milan and took over the castle by deception, which led to a confrontation with the Spaniards. During these events, as well as with the Landsknechts, it seems that the people of Caslino used the fortress located in the area called Ca Piria as a lookout and signal point.

From 1300 to 1550, the people of Caslino lived in relative comfort with the products of pastoralism and agriculture, but with the Spanish domination, which lasted until the beginning of the 18th century, there was tyranny, ignorance, and poverty everywhere, the lands were left uncultivated, and the state and municipalities were burdened with debts. Among the many disasters, it is necessary to also worth mentioning is the Plague of 1630 (immortalized by Manzoni in *The Betrothed*), which spread with the rise of the Landsknechts (German army in the pay of Emperor Ferdinand II, who came to Italy with the intention of pursuing the conquest of the Duchy of Mantua).

The Spaniards were then succeeded by the Austrians, a flourishing and peaceful period that brought important works, including the cadastre, and finally the French with Napoleon Bonaparte.

Witness to all these historical events, today imposing in its decay but once a symbol of enlightened power and extreme elegance, is the Palazzo Pecori-Castelletti, an ancient historic residence located in the town center.

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## **2) HISTORICAL WITNESS is PALAZZO PECORI**

### **a) Middle Ages – 1700.**

Palazzo Pecori stands on the remains of the Castle, which at the time was that of Castellino Maggiore. In the Middle Ages, in fact, there were two nuclei: Castellino Maggiore, or today's Caslino, and Castellino Minore, which was located near the church of San Calogero.

It is said that the inhabitants of Caslino Minore, following landslides from the mountain above, were so frightened that they demolished their houses to rebuild them around the original nucleus of Caslino Maggiore. Certainly until 1400, where Palazzo Pecori now stands, there was a castle: we have confirmation from a document from 1398, which refers to a meeting between the inhabitants of Caslino to ask for money from the Duke of Milan to repair the structure (exposed to reprisals). Probably at a later time the castle was razed to the ground to be partially rebuilt in 1400 (since from the wall surveys carried out in 2008 some walls from

1400 were found) and then in 1700 it was brought back into vogue by the Morello family, who built their own home with the structure that is now present.

**b) 1700 - 1750 .**

The Morellos arrive in Caslino, wholesale charcoal merchants, foreigners, who once settled decided to embark on the path of silk.

Antonio Morello built in 1716 a very advanced spinning mill and thread factory capable of producing a significant amount of silk, exploiting the hydraulic power of the "Piot" stream, not only for 4 or 5 months as was customary, but throughout the year.

And so, precisely because of the development of the silk processing and trading activity, Caslino d'Erba reached, in the 1700s, its maximum splendor, so much so that it was considered the capital of silk.

Proof of this success is, on the one hand, the publication by Count Pietro Verri in 1763, titled "Considerations on the trade of the State of Milan", on the other hand the majesty of the Pecori Palace, built by the Morello on a previous Roman and medieval base in the central core of the village, as it appears today.

**c) 1750 – 1850.**

The Palace then passed into the hands of the Bonfiglio family and subsequently to the Castelletti, an ancient and noble family of Brianza, of which we certainly remember Mrs. Teresa Carini Castelletti, also known as “The mayoress”.

What we know about the Mayoress is that at 20 years old, she married the noble Cesare Castelletti (a family that in the first half of the 19th century still demonstrated the old grit and character).

Teresa Carini was a woman of unique personality; a female figure who had been able to assert herself in the political landscape of the time for her remarkable abilities, for her wisdom and foresight.

She had managed to earn the unlimited trust of the entire country, so much so that it seems she played the role of conciliatory judge.

**d) 1850 – 1940.**

Teresa Carini and Cesare Castelletti had a daughter, Placida Castelletti, who got married with Enrico Pecori, a watchmaker and inventor of the steam tricycle, today kept at the Automobile Museum of Turin among the pioneers of motoring.

Right under the portico, we find two large wheels, belonging to the famous steam tricycle, invented by Sir Enrico Pecori in 1891.

The Pecori Palace takes its name precisely from this illustrious character: from watchmaker, he ended up becoming the inventor of what is today a piece of history.

Born into a noble family, Cav. Pecori was born in Florence and, after a long journey, he arrived in Caslino.

He was the first cyclist to travel the roads of Como on a bicycle with two large wheels and a very small one, which he designed in 1874, leading to the invention of the Tricycle in 1891.

With this means of transport, he traveled for several years, during which he perfected his initial idea, so much so that he was able to build other models that were then requested in Spain and Portugal.

In Caslino d'Erba, he continued to dedicate himself to mechanics and hydraulics, to the study of the first motorcycles and to watchmaking.

He devised the gear change for motorcycles which he applied to some machines. In addition, he designed the aqueduct of the town of Caslino, earning a gold medal and a certificate of merit, and he cooperated in the spread of electric power in the area.

In 1935, his son, the colonel Augusto Pecori donated the steam tricycle to the Automobile Museum of Turin, where it is still displayed today.

#### **e) 1940 – 1985.**

Pecori Palace was finally inherited by Colonel Augusto Pecori, son of Enrico, and his wife, Angelina Colombo, born in Milan.

The two had a daughter, Enrica, who died before her parents.

Augusto died in 1962, while Mrs. Pecori, after donating the building to the Municipality in 1985, died in 1992.

The gift that the lady had made is to be considered of great generosity, as well as the meaning she had attributed to it, namely the desire to leave something unique and prestigious to the community.

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### **3) PECORI PALACE AND ART**

Pecori Palace was once recognized for the refinement of its ancient owners, in particular on one side the Morello, who as enriched foreigners longed to make known and highlight their prosperity and success, and on the other the Castelletti, who as an ancient and noble family from Brianza.

They had the duty to honor their origins. For these reasons, it is still possible to observe today, despite the signs of time, wonderful frescoes and decorations inside the residence.

In the dining room, for example, we have convivial-themed subjects (fruits and other products of the earth, sphinxes).

The private chapel, built by Giuseppe Antonio Morello (from which the wealth and importance of the family can still be seen) was entirely frescoed, as was the alcove upstairs, by Filippo Comerio, a Como artist of the 18th century, who became the greatest decorator of Faenza ceramics (so much so that the green used by him on the white enamel of the majolica was named "Comerio green" in his honor). And it is precisely the frescoes that we find in the alcove that represent one of the greatest riches of Palazzo Pecori, what particularly intensifies its artistic value.

These are perfectly preserved frescoes depicting two allegorical figures: Spring and Peace, surrounded by rich frames and motifs related to the fertility of the earth, alluding to the wealth that comes to Man from nature and agriculture.

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#### **4) PECORI PALACE AND MAGIC**

Pecori Palace is also a place linked to Magic and why not to the Occult: a circumstance that can be noticed by anyone who has the opportunity to visit it.

There are in this residence details to which no one can give an explanation or that had an explanation but it has been lost over time.

Among these is... the tarot room or also the esoteric room, so called because of the drawings found inside.

In fact, on one wall there are the zodiac signs, on the opposite side 10 flamingos flying towards two spheres of light. Finally, in the innermost part we have the representation of the tarot.

We still do not know to whom the conception of this room can be attributed. There are currently two hypotheses: perhaps it was wanted by Enrica, the daughter of Augusto Pecori, or by Augusto himself, as it was known that Mussolini was passionate about esotericism and probably the colonel was too, or by Placida Castelletti, Augusto's grandmother.

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#### **5) OTHER CURIOSITIES**

In the living room we find a huge fireplace in black Varenna marble, with a molded frame and a well-preserved coffered wooden ceiling. In the hearth you can read the inscription "In igne laetitia", of strong Masonic value, also found in various imperfections of the room, including some floor tiles. The meaning can be found in the concept that perfection was attributable only to God.