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## The Story of Rosati, Missouri

BY

JOHN E. RYBOLT, C.M.

American Vincentians and others interested in American Catholic history know well the name of Joseph Rosati (1789-1843). As the first bishop of Saint Louis, Rosati significantly influenced the future of that immense diocese from 1826 until his death. Besides the usual ecclesiastical reminiscences such as buildings or Knights of Columbus Councils, the bishop's name lives on in the small hamlet of Rosati, Missouri, and in the area's winery. What is the story of Rosati, Missouri?

In the early 1890s in various provinces of Italy, life was harsh, particularly for peasant farmers. They received little or nothing for the crops they raised, and suffered political repression. All through Italy, both American and Italian land companies offered land in America on easy terms. The migrants would be able to meet the costs of transportation by installment payments after their first harvest in America.

Several families from northern Italy agreed to grow cotton for the Sunnyside Corporation. They banded together to travel to New Orleans, and then up the Mississippi to Sunnyside, Arkansas. This low and swampy area differed so much from the northern mountains which they left behind that the new migrants were miserable and unsuccessful. Malaria, for example, carried off nearly one-third of the group in only three years. In view of this, some of the men scouted out possible areas in which to relocate. One group decided to move on to another Arkansas location, now called Tontitown, near Springdale. Another group of fifty families opted for Knobview, Missouri, some four miles east of Saint James, and located in Phelps County.

In 1898 the Saint Louis-San Francisco Railroad (popularly known as the Frisco) owned nearly all the land there. With the help and encouragement of Archbishop John Glennon of Saint Louis, the settlers were able to buy property at two dollars an acre. The railroad provided empty boxcars for them to live in until they could arrange for more suitable dwellings. The men worked for the railway in the west during the summers, and in the winters set to clearing land. They eventually began raising grapes, since the soil at Knobview resembled what they had left behind in Italy. They sent back for vine cuttings from Italy, but

none of them survived in Missouri. Instead, the settlers discovered that the Concord grape did well, and they obtained shoots from a French colony in Dillon, Missouri. This variety survived and, beginning in 1921, they had developed an industry.

In 1906, Archbishop John J. Glennon of Saint Louis sent them an Italian pastor, Father Ottavio Leone. From that time on, several other pastors and three church buildings have successively served the spiritual needs of these Italian Catholic families.

The name Knobview was a problem. It derived from three knobs of land that look down over the settlement from the south. Several towns of the period had "knob" in their names (such as Knobnoster and Knob Lick), and this similarity resulted in missent mail.<sup>1</sup> Besides, the name was not Italian. Consequently, beginning in the late 1920s, the immigrants sought another name. At first they thought of Saint Anthony (of Padua), but discovered three other settlements called Saint Anthony. Then a group of families suggested Piazza, after Antonio Piazza, a leader of the original group and the first Italian postmaster. This choice was probably doomed because of conflicts with the other families. At this juncture, the scholarly Charleville B. Faris, their pastor since 1923, suggested Rosati.

With the name Rosati, their problem was solved, and the local postmaster and the other families agreed to take the necessary legal steps. Faris approached Rowland L. Johnston, their congressman from Rolla, and others sought added help from the Italian consul in Saint Louis. Someone, probably Faris himself, had the following text printed on a flyer with Rosati's portrait:

It has been proposed that the name of our community be changed from Knobview to ROSATI. It is befitting that a community founded through hardships and sacrifices by people of Italian birth and still inhabited almost exclusively by people of Italian extraction, the only such community in the State of Missouri, should by its name perpetuate the memory of the one Italian who has contributed so much to the earliest development of the Mississippi Valley. . . .

The Americans of Italian extraction who are justly proud of their descent ought to feel indebted to this pioneer more deeply than others. It is only in a small measure that we can acknowledge our debt to the foremost esponent [*sic*] of Italy's contribution to the conquest of the West and to the development of America by perpetuating his name and

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<sup>1</sup>Knobview had changed its name once before, in 1899. It had been known as Spading, after the first postmaster. When the postmaster changed in 1904, the original name returned (*Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri* III:435. S.v. Rosati).

keeping alive the memory of his great endeavors in the community that our fathers built so that our children also and our children's children may learn his name and revere his memory.<sup>2</sup>

By January 1931, the Post Office agreed to the Knobview petition, and the tiny settlement—it has never been an incorporated town—officially changed its name from Knobview to Rosati. The date for the change was 1 February. The residents greeted their new name enthusiastically, but practically everyone else in the United States outside Missouri ignored it.

This contrasts sharply with the attention the change of name received in Fascist Italy. In the inflated rhetoric of that period, the unincorporated hamlet was a *città*, an important city. The following pieces will give some of the flavor.<sup>3</sup>

On 10 March 1931 the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced to the mayor of Sora, Rosati's birthplace: "News has been received from New York with great satisfaction among Italians that the city of Krowbview [*sic*] in Missouri has changed its name to Rosati." On 13 March Rome radio carried the announcement. Italian newspapers and magazines, both national and foreign, picked up the story.

This news pleases every good Italian, and fills with joy the hearts of the fellow citizens of this great pioneer exalted by the Americans. . . . The mayor of Sora, Commendatore Paolo Zeri, interpreted the public's gratitude by sending a message to the Magistrate of the city of Rosati. He also had a plaque erected at the Sora city hall to recall the event, and named the street on which Joseph Rosati was born "Via Rosati" (the citizens had called Via Valle by that name for a century in memory of their illustrious fellow citizen), and also named the river road Giuseppe Rosati.

.. .  
This is the inscription in honor of Bishop Rosati, dictated by our bishop, Agostino Mancinelli, and placed on the wall of the city hall:

AS THE LANDS OF AMERICA EXALT  
JOSEPH ROSATI  
WHO WITH EPISCOPAL ROMAN VISION  
HAS BEGOTTEN IMPERISHABLE WORKS

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<sup>2</sup>Flyer in Archdiocese of Saint Louis Archives, Rosati file.

<sup>3</sup>Achille Lauri, "Il Vescovo Rosati e una città Americana a lui intitolata," *Note illustrative sulla città di Sora* (Sora: 1933), 24-26.

OF EDUCATION AND CHARITY  
 THE CITY OF SORA, HIS MOTHER  
 DISPLAYS HIM TO HER CHILDREN.  
 AGOSTINO MANCINELLI  
 1933, YEAR 11, FASCIST ERA

The work of Professor Achille Lauri seems to have fostered much of the interest in Rosati. He had pursued research on his subject in Sora since 1913. Regrettably, Lauri never had the chance of visiting Knobview. Had he done so, he would have realized the true nature of the so-called city, and learned to spell its original name correctly. Lauri spells the name of the settlement as Krowbview, a strange enough term for the Italian language, which does not normally use k or w. Virtually no Italian source reported the name exactly, and it appears as Krowbiew, Krobwiew, Knowbiew, Krowbview, and even Hrowbview.

In 1951, Lauri reported happily that civil authorities in Rome had named a street after Rosati in that year. Via Giuseppe Rosati runs near the church of Saint Vincent de Paul in the working-class Tor Sapienza district, a parish staffed by Vincentians.

The Italian public would doubtless be distressed to visit the phantom city of Rosati today. In the days of the weekend outings by train from Saint Louis, ninety-six miles to the northwest, the village of Rosati boasted a post office, stores, a saloon, two schools, and a church and rectory. The post office, one of the occasions for the change of name, closed in 1963. The only remaining store also closed, as the younger people were working in larger towns nearby. They send their children elsewhere to school, since the public grade school and junior high school have ceased as well. The church continues, however, as a mission of the town of Saint James, but it numbers fewer than 150 parishioners.

The most recognizable remaining feature is the Rosati winery, owned and operated since 1935 by several firms. Its bottles carry the Rosati name on the labels, but nothing else, no portrait or even a symbol, connects their contents with the first bishop of Saint Louis, Joseph Rosati, priest of the Congregation of the Mission.

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