



## *Welcome to the Martha Storyboards Virtual Albums!*

*The Martha Storyboards present **highlights** of the Martha Story. For additional historical information, consult James Cameron, *And Martha Served* (2000): [And Martha Served.pdf](#)*

*The stained-glass motifs and vibrant colours of the Storyboards are inspired by the Bethany Chapel Windows [Rambusch of Canada], now located in the **Heritage Gallery**, Parkland.*

*Except when noted, historical photographs on the Storyboards have been scanned from originals in the **CSM Archives, Bethany Resource Centre**, Antigonish. Photographs on the Storyboards were edited to fit into the stained-glass designs. The original photographs, with full descriptions, are reproduced in the Storyboards Albums. [Information added by archivist, including estimated dates, is entered in square brackets.]*

*When professed, Sisters chose a **religious name**. In 1967, Marthas could retain their religious name or revert to their baptismal name and surname. The Albums identify Sisters by both their religious and secular names.*

*The **Notes** suggest additional resources that are readily accessible online – many more are available at your local library. Consult the Martha website for information on **current programs and activities**.*

# "I just felt I had to get up": The Founding Moment



In 1894, Bishop John Cameron appealed to young women in the Diocese of Antigonish to join a new religious community, the Sisters of St. Martha, an auxiliary of the Sisters of Charity (Halifax). The mission of the Marthas Auxiliary was domestic work in Catholic institutions.

On 12 July 1900, Bishop Cameron invited the Marthas to leave the Halifax Sisters, and to establish an independent congregation in Antigonish. Volunteers were asked to stand.

Mary MacArthur (Sr. M. Faustina) recalled: *"I just felt I had to get up."* Fifteen women stood. The decision to leave the familiar Motherhouse in Halifax was traumatic for the Antigonish volunteers: *"We were...feeling like rebels."*

THE MARTHAS WHO STOOD ARE OUR FOUNDING SISTERS.



Sister M. Andrew (Margaret) MacDonald,  
Boisdale, Cape Breton County (1873-1937)

Sister M. Francis (Elizabeth) MacAdam,  
East Bay, Cape Breton County (1869-1942)

Sister M. Theda (Bridget Elen) Chisholm,  
Gaysborough, Invervale (1872-1922)



Sister M. Marcella (Leah) Beaton,  
Black River, Inverness County  
(1878-1957)

Sister M. Ninian (Agnes) Beaton,  
Black River, Inverness County  
(1876-1956)

Sister M. Benjaminia (Mary Belle) Beaton,  
Black River, Inverness County  
(1880-1934)

The Founding Marthas came from small rural communities in the Diocese of Antigonish. They were familiar with hard work and poverty. The fifteen women included two sets of sisters: the Beatons (Leah, Agnes and Mary Belle) and the MacArthurs (Laura, Margaret and Mary). None of the Founding Women was an experienced administrator; five were novices.

The Sisters' first ministry - household service at St. Francis Xavier - expanded quickly into healthcare, education, social work, and spiritual development throughout Canada and beyond.



Sister M. Anne (Katie) MacAdam,  
West River, Antigonish County (1871-1907 withdrew)

Sister M. Dorothy (Isabel) Beaton,  
Northeast Mabou, Inverness County (1870-1949)

Sister M. Theodore (Julia) Sampson,  
Petit de Gras, Richmond County (1867-1950)



Sister M. Remegius (Laura) MacArthur,  
Pine Tree, Pictou County  
(1875-1927)

Sister M. Jovita (Margaret) MacArthur,  
Pine Tree, Pictou County  
(1872-1927)



Sister Joseph Agnes (Janet) MacDonald,  
Antigonish, Antigonish County (1877-1929)

Sister M. Innocentia (Caroline) MacNamara,  
Lower River inhabitants, Richmond County (1871-1909)

Sister M. Potens (Mary Anastasia) Landry,  
Afton, Antigonish County (1870-1967)  
Longest Surviving Founder

Sister M. Faustina (Mary) MacArthur,  
Pine Tree, Pictou County  
(1873-1954)

## *“I just felt I had to get up...”: The Founding Moment*



*Sr. Mary Faustina, St. Martha's  
Convent, 1903 / Waldren Studio*

In 1894, **Bishop John Cameron** appealed to women in the Antigonish Diocese to join a new religious community, the **Sisters of St. Martha**, an auxiliary of the **Sisters of Charity (Halifax)**. The mission of the Marthas Auxiliary was to perform domestic work in Catholic charitable institutions. On 12 July 1900, Bishop Cameron invited the Marthas to leave the Halifax Sisters and establish an independent congregation in Antigonish. Volunteers for the new Antigonish community were asked to stand.

**Sister Mary Faustina (Mary) MacArthur** recalled: *“I just felt I had to get up.”* Fifteen women stood. The decision to leave the familiar Motherhouse in Halifax was a great loss to the Sisters of Charity and traumatic for the Antigonish volunteers: *“We were...feeling like rebels.”*

None of the Founding Women were experienced administrators; five were novices. But from these 15 women came a religious Sisterhood who worked in diverse fields –healthcare, education, social work, pastoral services - in Canada and beyond.

## *Who were the Founding Marthas?*

The Diocese of Antigonish included three counties on the Nova Scotian mainland (Pictou, Antigonish, and Guysborough), and all of Cape Breton Island (Inverness, Victoria, Richmond and Cape Breton counties). The Founding Marthas came from small rural communities in the Antigonish Diocese, typically isolated farming and fishing settlements. **Elizabeth (Betsey) MacAdam**, a resident of East Bay (Cape Breton) and the first to join the Marthas (1894), wrote: “*I never was away from home much and don’t know what travelling is.*”

The census enumerator listed nineteen Sisters resident at St. Martha’s Convent (1901) and their ethnic identities reflected their rural origins. Ten Marthas identified themselves as “*Scotch*” and their mother tongue as Gaelic; three as French.

Many of the Founders were cash-poor. **Caroline MacNamara**, later the first Superior, had worried that it “*would be [too] expensive for a poor girl to enter*” the convent. Other congregations requested dowries from entrants.



*Sister Mary Innocentia (Caroline) MacNamara, first superior, Lower River Inhabitants, Richmond County, 1871-1909 / Dodge (Glace Bay, N.S.). Detail.*



**Founders from Antigonish County.** (L-R): *Sister Mary Anne (Katie) MacAdam*, West River, Antigonish County, 1871-  
withdrew 1907 / sketch by A. Syperek; *Sr. Joseph Agnes (Janet) MacDonald*, Arisaig, Antigonish County, 1877-1929  
[photograph taken between 1904 and 1911]; *Sr. Mary Potens (Mary Anastasia) Landry*, Afton, Antigonish County, 1870-1967  
[photograph taken between 1935 and 1967]. Sister Landry died at Bethany Motherhouse at 97, the last of the Founders.

Like other religious congregations, the Marthas adopted habits that indicated their separation from secular society and their unique identity. Changes to the habit, especially headgear, were made in 1904, 1911, 1922, and 1935. Following the religious renewals of the 1960s, secular clothes and veils became optional.



**Some Founders from Cape Breton (L-R):**

*Sister Mary Andrew (Margaret) MacDonald*, Boisdale, Cape Breton County, 1873-1937.

**Sr. Mary Dorothy (Isabel) Beaton**, Northeast Mabou, Inverness County, 1870-1949 / Waldren Studio [photo taken at St. Martha's Convent, 1903?]. The original is held by **Dalhousie University Archives**.

*Sr. Mary Theodore (Julia) Sampson*, Petit de Gras, Richmond County, 1867-1950 [Detail from photograph taken in Toronto, 1913]



***The Beatons, Black River, Inverness Co.***

*Sister Mary Marcella (Leah)*, 1878-1957; *Sr. Mary Ninian (Agnes)*, 1876 – withdrew 1915; *Sr. Mary Benjamina (Mary Belle)*, 1880 – 1934. Photograph taken at St. Martha's Covent / Waldren Studio

## *Kinship ties among the Founders*

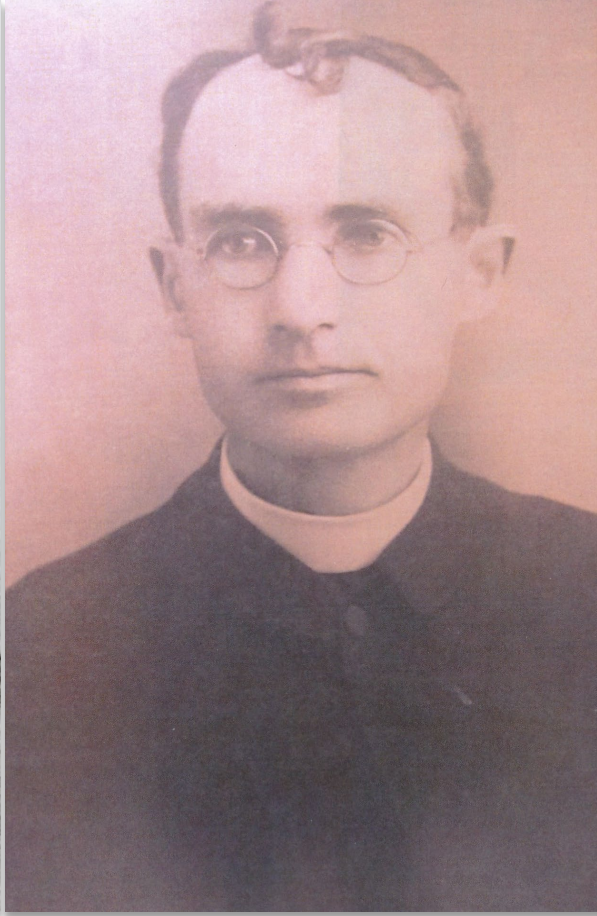
The Founding Women included two sets of sisters: The Beaton sisters and the MacArthur sisters.



***The MacArthurs, Pine Tree, Pictou Co.***

*Sister Mary Faustina (Mary)*, 1873-1954  
*Sr. Mary Remegius (Laura)*, 1875-1927  
Waldren Studio. Full portrait  
*Sr. Mary Jovita (Margaret)*, 1878-1957  
[photograph taken in Toronto, 1913].





*Sister Mary Thecla (Bridget Ellen) Chisholm, Guysborough*

**Intervale**, 1872-1902 / sketch by A. Syperek. *Rev. Daniel Chisholm*, 1859-1905. Father Dan was a St. F.X. professor, 1888-98, and Rector, 1891-98.

*Sister Mary Francis (Elizabeth) MacAdam, East Bay, Cape*

**Breton Co.**, 1869-1942. *Sr. MacAdam with younger brother, Rev. Michael MacAdam*, 1873-1950 / Waldren Studio [photo taken at St. Martha's Convent, 1901]. The original image of the MacAdams is held by the Dalhousie University Archives.

Some Founders had family ties to St.F.X. Bridget Ellen Chisholm's older brother was **Father Dan Chisholm**, the College Rector and advocate for the establishment of the Marthas. Betsey (Elizabeth) MacAdam's brother, Father Michael MacAdam, was headmaster, St. F.X. High School, some of whose pupils boarded at the College, and later, a priest stationed in the St. Ninian's Parish, Antigonish (1900-24).



*...a note on the photographs of the Founding Marthas*



Currently, the CSM Archives does not have photographs of all Founders circa 1900. Hence, the images on the Storyboards portray the Sisters in diverse habits and in different decades of service. There were no photographs of **Sr. M. Thecla Chisholm** or **Sr. M. Anne MacAdam**; the Marthas commissioned artist Anna Syperek to create portraits based on family photographs of relatives.

This photograph, *First Martha Sisters on staff, St. Augustine's Seminary, Toronto, 1913*, includes six Founders. The portraits of **Sisters Theodore Sampson** and **Jovita MacArthur** on the Storyboards are details from this image.

**Seated:** *Sisters Mary Theodore (Julia) Sampson\**, *Mary Dorothy (Isabel) Beaton\**, *Mother Mary Faustina (Mary) MacArthur\** (Superior), *Francis de Sales (Annie) MacLellan*, *Mary Andrew (Margaret) MacDonald\**.

**Standing:** *Sisters Mary Teresa (May) Landry*, *Mary Alphonsus (Mary Katie) MacLellan*, *Mary Jovita (Margaret) MacArthur\**, *Mary Remegius (Laura) MacArthur\**

\*Founders

## *“The People’s Sisters”*

The Founders were familiar with hard work and poverty. **Leah Beaton** was a weaver at the Glendyre Mills, Cape Breton, before she entered the congregation. **Mary MacArthur** had been a tailor.

That experience proved useful in the early years. **Sister Joseph Agatha (Mary) Hines**, who had entered the Marthas in 1900, recalled: *“We were very poor in these early days. I remember Mother M. Innocentia buying a pair of shoes. Sister M. Potens wore them in the forenoon, while she worked at the College, and Mother wore them in the afternoon, if she had to go downtown shopping.”* **Sixty Years** (1960), 90.

But these 15 women, with very little cash or previous administrative experiences, are Founders of a religious Sisterhood that worked in multiple ministries: household management, healthcare, education, social work and pastoral care, both in Canada and beyond.



*The Founding Women /*  
Sr. Irene (Mary Anselm) Doyle

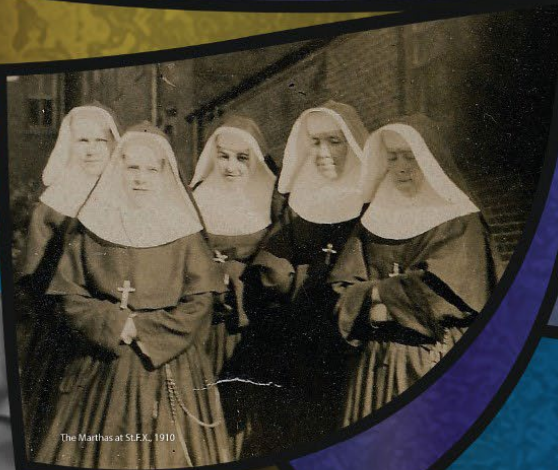
# “Virtuous, young women of robust health, and of industrious habits”



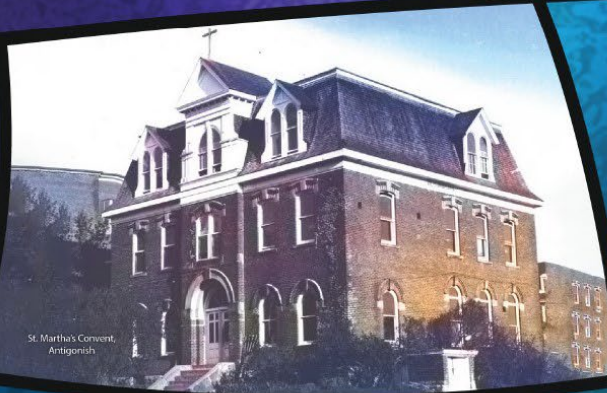
St. Francis Xavier College, the only Catholic university in the Diocese of Antigonish, provided education to prospective priests and future professionals. “Dr. Dan” Chisholm, the College Rector, wanted a religious order of women to do the domestic work on campus while maintaining a spiritual atmosphere for the students.

The Bishop of Antigonish, John Cameron, who was also the Chancellor of the College, made an agreement with the Sisters of Charity to train prospective Sisters for the new institution. In a Circular sent throughout the diocese, he recruited young women for the Sisters of St. Martha, appealing for *“virtuous, young women of robust health, and of industrious habits... not over 26 years and not under 18.”*

The first Martha recruits left the Antigonish train station on 19 September 1894 for Mount St. Vincent Motherhouse, Halifax. There, they received religious instruction, observed periods of prayer and silence, and were carefully schooled in domestic duties required in Catholic institutions: cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, sewing, and tending to the chapel.



The Marthas at St.F.X., 1910

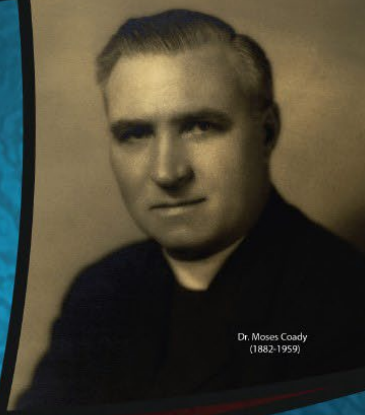


St. Martha's Convent, Antigonish

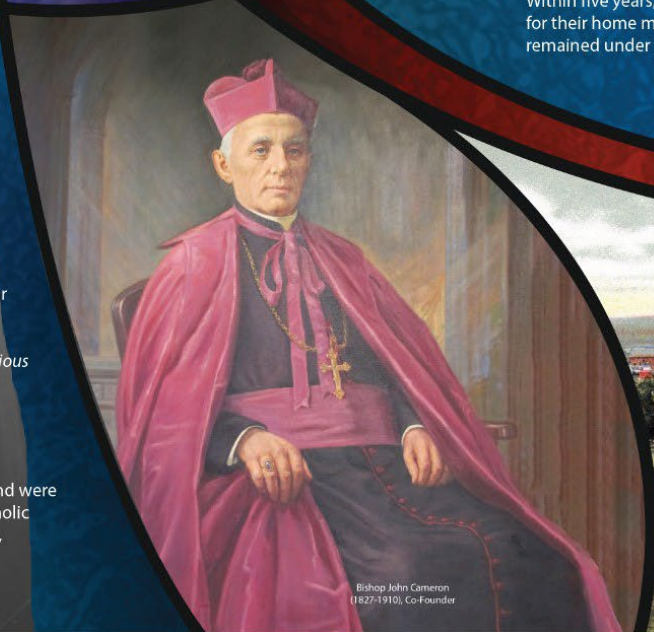
With time, the Marthas wanted independence to expand their work beyond the *“domestic duties of the College.”* Supported by professor-priest Dr. Moses Coady, the Sisters achieved *“Home Rule”* in 1917. *“If we do not let them go,”* he said, *“we will lose them.”*

St. Francis Xavier College promised a convent for the new Sisters and men from the Parish volunteered their labour. The College completed the building in 1897 at the cost of \$25,000. It also built a new kitchen, laundry facilities, and an infirmary. The first Sisters of the new congregation arrived in Antigonish on 16 July 1900, the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, to care for 130 students and 5 resident professors.

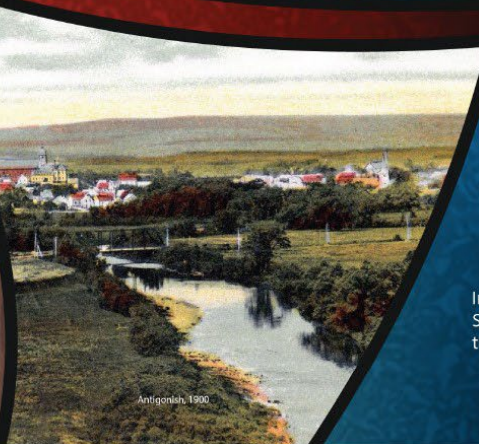
Within five years, the Sisters had accepted requests from other communities for their home management skills and for nursing care. However, the Sisters remained under the jurisdiction of the College Board.



Dr. Moses Coady (1882-1969)



Bishop John Cameron (1827-1910), Co-Founder



Antigonish, 1900



In 2003, the Sisters of St. Martha joined the Sisters of Charity Federation, completing a circle that began in 1894.



*Antigonish, Nova Scotia* [1900]. Scan of postcard, courtesy of Peggy Thompson, **Old Photos of Antigonish Town & County**  
(2) [Old Photos of Antigonish Town & Antigonish County | Facebook](#)



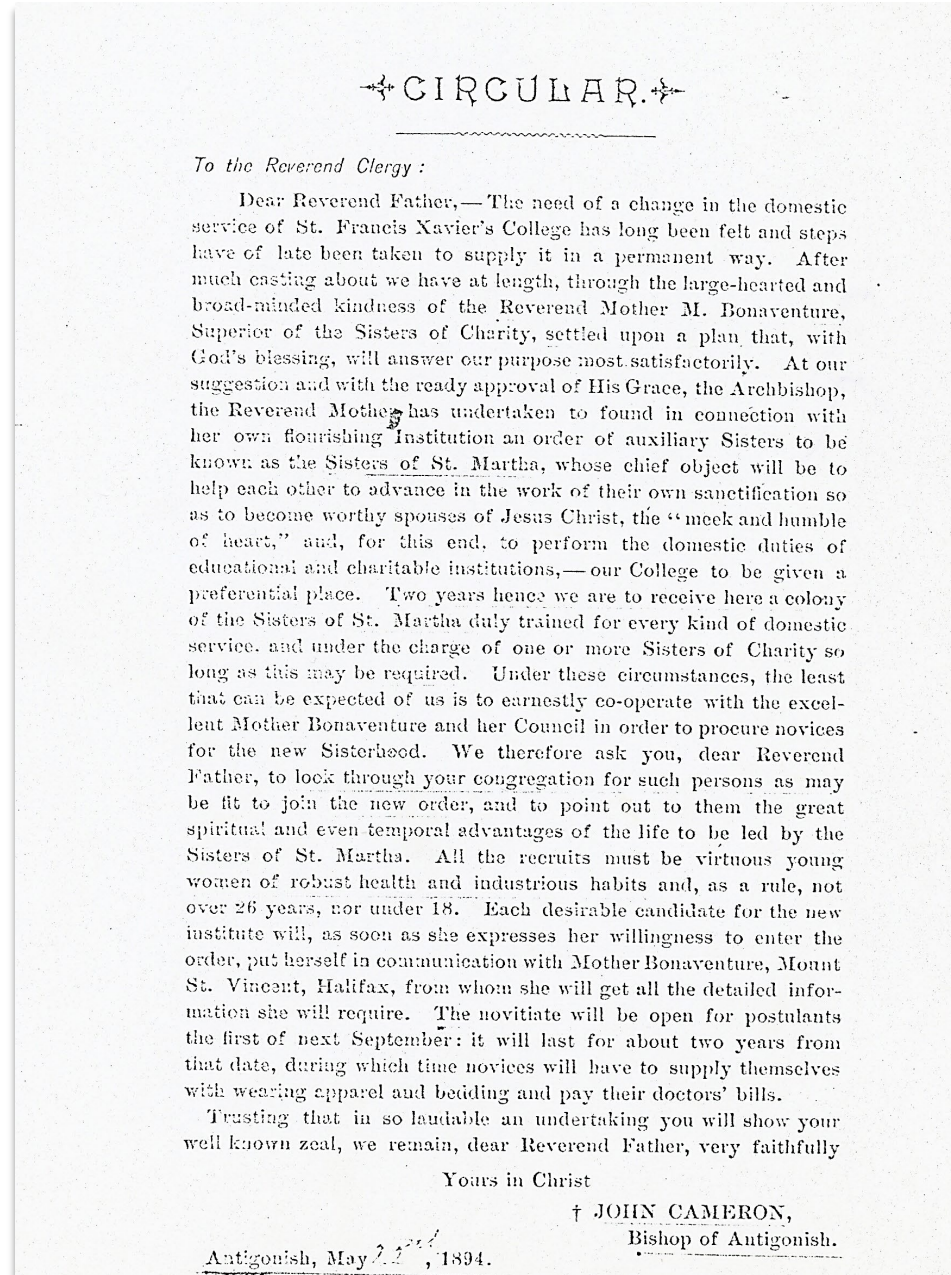
*Xavier Hall and St. Martha's Convent*, published in **Tir a Phailteis / The Land of Plenty: Antigonish Town and County** (1916).

**St. Francis Xavier College**, the only Catholic university in the Antigonish Diocese, provided education to prospective priests and future professionals. Rector "*Dr. Dan*" Chisholm sought a religious order of women to perform the domestic work on campus – meals, laundry, cleaning, infirmary duties – while maintaining a spiritual atmosphere for students. After several failed attempts to interest existing religious congregations, **John Cameron**, Bishop of Antigonish and St. F.X. Chancellor, made an agreement with the **Sisters of Charity** (Halifax) to provide Sisters for St. F.X.



**Bishop John Cameron, 1827-1910 / Francis J. Haxby [oil on canvas: 1.52 x 1.24m].** The Marthas commissioned Haxby to paint the portrait of Bishop Cameron for the Golden Jubilee of the congregation. The study is based on a Waldren studio portrait.

In a *Circular* sent throughout the diocese, Bishop John Cameron recruited young women for the Sisters of St. Martha:



**Excerpts from Circular:**

[Sisters of Charity will found]... *“an order of Auxiliary Sisters to be known as the Sisters of St. Martha...to perform the domestic duties of educational and charitable institutions, our College [St. Francis Xavier] to be given a preferential place...”*

*“...all recruits must be virtuous, young women of robust health, and of industrious habits.. not over 26 years and not under 18” [emphasis added]*

Yours in Christ  
† JOHN CAMERON,  
Bishop of Antigonish.  
Antigonish, May 22, 1894.

## *The Martha Auxiliary:*

The Antigonish **Casket** reported that the first Martha candidates left the Antigonish Train Station on September 19, 1894, for Mount St. Vincent Motherhouse, Halifax. “*The first of the recruits from Antigonish for the Sisters of St. Martha lately founded under the auspices of the Sisters of Charity left town yesterday...*” The first woman from the Antigonish Diocese to join the Auxiliary was **Elizabeth MacAdam**, East Bay, Cape Breton, later Founder **Sr. Mary Francis**.

In Halifax, the volunteers received religious instruction, observed periods of prayer and silence, and were carefully schooled in domestic duties required in Catholic institutions: cooking, cleaning, laundry, sewing, and care of the chapel.



*Antigonish Railway Station and freight sheds, Intercolonial Railroad [ca. 1900]. The wooden building was replaced by a brick structure (1908) that now accommodates the Antigonish Heritage Museum.*



*St. Martha's Convent, St. F.X. campus, and Motherhouse (1900-1921). The Convent moved to Morrison Hall in 1938.*



A local carpenter, Angus D. Chisholm, crafted an altar, “*a real gem*” for the Marthas. The altar is now preserved at the **CSM Heritage Centre**.

**The MARTHAS at St. Francis Xavier University:** In turn, St. F.X. prepared for the Auxiliary by constructing a convent suitable for 25 Sisters. Men from the Parish volunteered their labour and their teams to haul stone from local quarries for the building. The convent was completed in 1897 at the cost of \$25,000. The College also built a new kitchen, laundry and infirmary. The first ten Marthas, mentored by three Charities, arrived in July 1897. However, by 1900, St. F.X. required more Sisters than the Charities could provide. Bishop Cameron determined to form an independent congregation to focus on the needs of Catholic institutions in the Antigonish Diocese.





*Unidentified Martha, St. Martha's Convent, April 1907 / Waldren Studio, Dalhousie University Archives. Note the new habit adopted in 1904.*



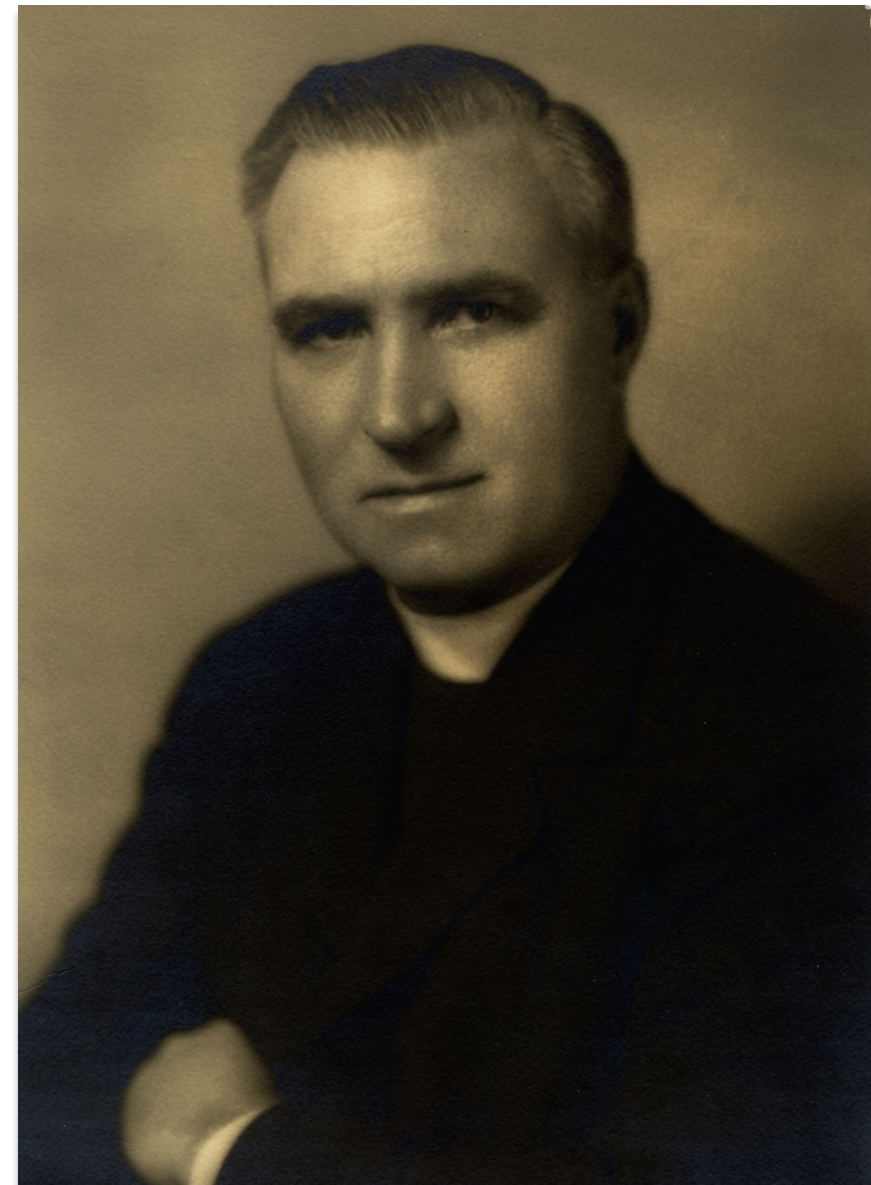
*Sisters Mary Dorothy (Isabel) Beaton\*, Mary Andrew (Margaret) MacDonald\*, Joseph Agatha (Mary) Hines, Mary Anastasia (Rose) Lamont and M. Marcella (Leah) Beaton\*, St. Martha's Convent, St. F.X. [ca. 1911] \*Founders*

Four days following the *Founding Moment* (12 July 1900), the first independent Marthas arrived in Antigonish on the **Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel**. The new congregation adopted a new constitution that required them to “*assist and obey*” the St. F.X. administration.

## *Moving beyond "the College"*

Within five years, the Sisters had accepted requests from communities for their home management skills and for nursing care. However, the Marthas remained under the jurisdiction of the College Board of Governors, which controlled their finances and their choice of ministries.

The Marthas wanted independence to expand their work beyond the "*domestic duties of the College*". They were supported by professor-priest **Dr. Moses Coady**, who was reputed to have said, "*If we do not let them go, we will lose them.*" The Sisters achieved "*Home Rule*" in 1917.



*Dr. Moses Coady, priest-professor, activist, 1882-1959. Coady was a professor at St. F.X. (1910-28), and concurrently, principal, St. F.X. High School (1916-1925).*

## Completing the Circle

In 2003, 109 years following the establishment of the Sisters of St. Martha as an Auxiliary of the Sisters of Charity, the congregation joined the [Sisters of Charity Federation](#) to collaborate in programs for social and ecological justice, formation, and spirituality.



**The Cameron Sisters/Sisters, formerly Lower South River (Antigonish Co.), grand-nieces of Co-Founder Bishop John Cameron: Sister Baptista Maria Cameron, Sister of Charity; Sr. John Baptist (Margaret Ann) Cameron, Martha; Sr. Irenaeus Cameron, Sister of Charity; Sister Mary Hugh (Christina Catherine) Cameron, Martha.** The photograph was taken on 24 March 1954 in front of the Haxby portrait of Bishop Cameron on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Sr. John Baptist.



# Notes

For a description of the *Founding Moment* as central to the religious identity of the Sisters of St. Martha, see Sister Joan Fultz, “*The Marthas: A Story of Pioneering Faith*”(unpublished paper, 1994).

Many observations by Heidi MacDonald on the P.E.I. Martha pioneers are relevant to the Founders:

[The Social Origins and Congregational Identity of PEI Marthas 1915-1925.pdf.](#)

Many of the portraits of the Founders were taken by George R. Waldren (Waldren Studio, New Glasgow and Antigonish). Explore the Waldren Studio fonds, Dalhousie University Archives:

[The Waldren Studios.](#)

St. Francis Xavier was established in 1853 as a diocesan college and granted degree status in 1866. The term “*College*” continued to appear in official records; staff and alumni affectionately called St. F. X. “*the College*” after it obtained its legal charter from the N.S. government in 1866.

For a brief biography of Bishop John Cameron, Co-Founder, see: [Biography – CAMERON, JOHN \(1827-1910\) – Volume XIII \(1901-1910\) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography \(biographi.ca\)](#)

On *Home Rule*, see J. Cameron, p.63-66. He noted the Martha community tradition that Dr. Coady favoured their autonomy: “*The only way to hold the Sisters is to let them go.*” See also: Sr. Sarah Jeanette (Hugh Marie) MacPherson: [Struggle for Autonomy: A Sketch of the Sisters of St. Martha, 1900-1960.pdf](#)

