



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, 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**. 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 archivists, 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.*

“Not too bad for a living!”: Bethany Farm, 1922-1970



*“18 milk cows, 11 heifers, 6 calves, 60 pigs, 3 horses, 490 laying hens...cured hams, bacon, fresh eggs, milk, butter, & all that goes with it... black & white puddings, home-grown cereal...whole wheat bread, different kinds of vegetables & preserves, curds and buttermilk. Not too bad for a living!” **Bethanite**, 1946.*

The Marthas established Bethany Farm in 1922. Farm operations included livestock (dairy cattle, sheep, and pigs); poultry (hens, chickens, and turkeys); and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

In the late nineteenth century, many Canadian institutions – colleges, hospitals, orphanages, prisons, and poor asylums - operated their own farms. The Marthas' first ministry, **St. Francis Xavier University** (St. F.X.) owned a large farm, south of Xavier Hall. The students and professors, recalled an alumnus, were “*all country born and used to work on the farm*”; during harvest, they often broke from their studies and assisted the hired hands in the fields. Like their X-community, almost all Sisters initially were “*country born*”, and farm life was familiar and rewarding.

In 1921, the Marthas erected a 4-storey Motherhouse, **Bethany**, on fertile acreage near **St. Martha's Hospital**. The following year, they started **Bethany Farm**. Initially it was a small operation, worked by three men. Sisters planted fruit trees, tended to the hennery, and helped in the gardens. By the 1940s, Farm operations included livestock, poultry, and a wide variety of grains, fruits and vegetables. During that decade, Marthas also assumed “hands on” farm management roles. (Below: *Bethany Farm, 1945*)

As the Farm expanded, the Marthas sold surplus produce to Antigonish stores and to local institutions, including St. F.X., the R.K. MacDonald Guest House, and St. Martha's Hospital. They also distributed food to their missions in St. Andrew's, Canso, Trenton, as well as to the marginalised.



"Not too bad for a living!": Bethany Farm, 1922-1970

Would any of you care to learn the farm census? If so, here it is: 18 milk cows, 11 heifers, 6 calves, 1 Noah, 60 pigs, 3 horses, 490 laying hens, and 1 dog (in bad repute.) Fruits of the of the farm provided for our table are: cured hams, bacon, fresh eggs, milk, butter (an average of forty pounds weekly,) pork, beef (occasionally) and all that goes with it including black and white puddings, home grown cereal-- oatmeal and cracked wheat, whole wheat bread, different kinds of vegetables and preserves, curds and buttermilk. Not too bad for a living!

The title, *"Not too bad for a living"* was inspired by an article on Martha events at the Bethany Motherhouse. The item on Bethany Farm (1946-7) was published in **The Bethanite**, March 1947, page 3.

The Bethanite was an inhouse Martha newsletter, sharing *"love and cheer"* among Sisters in various Martha convents and ministries scattered across Canada. The first issue was compiled in 1929 as a Christmas surprise for the western missions.

Revived in 1935, the informal periodical was filled with community news, anecdotes, poems, and religious notes. Many subsequent issues carried detailed reports of the Bethany Farm, obviously appreciated and missed by nostalgic Sisters, many of whom had worked on the land as novitiates.



Sister David Marie (Mary) Beaton harvesting peas, summer 1956.

Sr. Beaton worked with Sr. Magdalene on Bethany Farm (1952-3) and succeeded her as manager (1954-8). She recalled planting, weeding, and harvesting the gardens; spraying and pruning the fruit trees; plucking chickens; and “*house-cleaning*” the barn in winter - scrubbing the walls and windows!

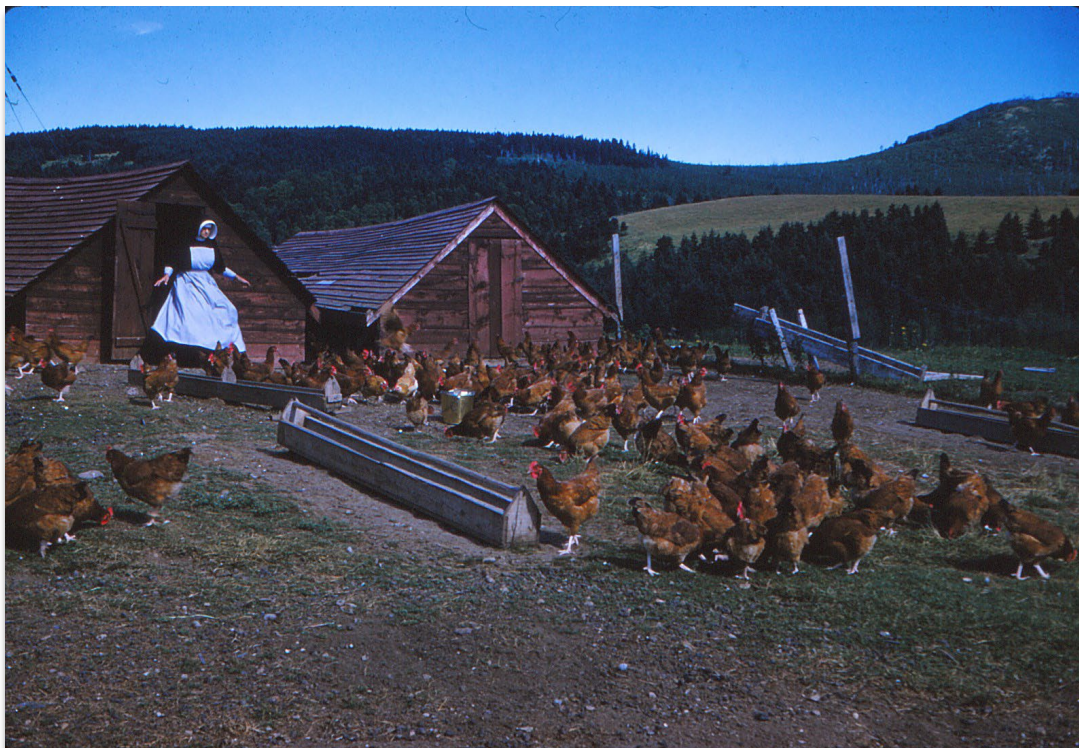


Sister Marie Trinitas (Clarine) O'Leary with pumpkin harvest, fall 1963.

The daughter of a poultry farmer-florist, Sr. O'Leary worked at Bethany Farm from 1961 to 1966.

Summer activities, Bethany Farm

Images scanned from slides [col.]



Sister Marie Amelia (Margaret Mary) Landry, with hens, July 1961

Raised on a prosperous farm in Lower South River, **Sr. Landry** managed the Bethany Farm from 1958-1961. The Martha poultry holdings included pure-bred brood, laying hens, and chicks – more than 1000 in the mid-1940s. The Farm featured a distinctive 2-storey henhouse, based on designs provided by the P.E.I. Marthas.



Novitiate sisters picking strawberries, July 1966



Sisters hulling strawberries, July 1966

"Women of the Land": Bethany Farm



The dairy herd at Bethany Farm provided the Marthas with milk, cream, butter, curds and buttermilk. The congregation purchased its first tractor in 1940. Sr. Magdalene (Theresa Alban) Lichacz, a hands-on farmer who supervised Bethany Farm from 1944-1958, marketed eggs, vegetables, and fruits, purchased and sold poultry and livestock, and maintained farm statistics.

Produce included pumpkins, squash, marrow, carrots, beans, corn, tomatoes, soybeans, watermelons, honeydew melons, citron, turnips, mangles, radishes, lettuce, Swiss chard, onions, cabbage, beets, potatoes, Brussels sprouts, rhubarb, strawberries: too many riches to list!

The Marthas learned the basics of beekeeping and honey production from the Augustinian Monks in Monastery, Antigonish County. In 1954, the Sisters produced 462 pounds of honey.

"It has been the usual thing to think of farm planning and the rearing of livestock as the unique province of men. ... The Sisters are making a success of their farm and are supplying many of their own food necessities, from bacon to honey." **The Casket** (1 October 1953)

The Motherhouse sold surplus produce to Antigonish stores and to local institutions, including St. Francis Xavier University, the R.K. MacDonald Guest House, and St. Martha's Hospital. The Sisters also distributed food to their missions in St. Andrew's, Canso, and Trenton, as well as to marginalised people.



In the 1950s, the Marthas sponsored several Dutch men to work on Bethany Farm as part of a government program to assist peoples from war-torn Europe. These Dutch dancers performed at the Day of the Wooden Shoes celebration, 23 August 1956.



More than 200 children from Antigonish County attended a rally of 4-H Clubs, hosted by Bethany Farm in July 1955.



The Bethany New Growers Program is a Marthas' initiative that reconnects the present with the heritage of the Bethany Farm.

“Women of the Land”: Bethany Farm

In 1953, the Marthas exhibited livestock, including prize Ayrshire cattle, at the annual Fall Fair, Antigonish. A commentator for the local newspaper, **The Casket**, described the farming initiatives of the Marthas, perhaps unmindful of the diverse work experiences of many rural women: *“Women of the Land”*:

...It [has] been the usual thing to think of farm planning and the rearing of livestock as the unique province of men...The Sisters are making a success of their farm and are supplying many of their own food necessities, from bacon to honey...At any rate we should not underestimate the significance of a group of women managing a farm and ... bringing it to an exemplary state of production. ”

Transcribed from *“Women of the Land”*
The Casket, 1 Oct. 1953 [clipping]



Sr. Marie Amelia (Margaret Mary) Landry has a good crop: harvesting carrots, Bethany Farm, fall 1958



Sister Magdalene (Teresa Alban) Lichacz, Bethany Farm manager, 1944-1958.

The daughter of Polish immigrants, Sr. Magdalene grew up on a 1000-acre farm in **Oakshela, Saskatchewan**, about 15 kilometres from **St. Peter's Hospital, Broadview**. Following her profession as a Martha (1944), she managed **Bethany Farm** for 14 years (Aug. 1944-July 1958). She marketed eggs, vegetables and fruits, purchased and sold poultry and livestock, and maintained farm statistics. Sr. Magdalene learned the basics of bee-keeping and honey production from the Augustinian monks, Monastery (Antigonish Co.). In 1954, the Marthas produced 462 pounds of honey.

Left: *Sr. Lichacz removing honey from beehive, 1950 [detail].*

Right: *"Taking skim milk to feed calves", 1952 : Sr. Lichacz driving the Martha tractor. The Marthas purchased their first tractor in 1940. The label on original snapshot recorded information provided by Sr. Lichacz.*



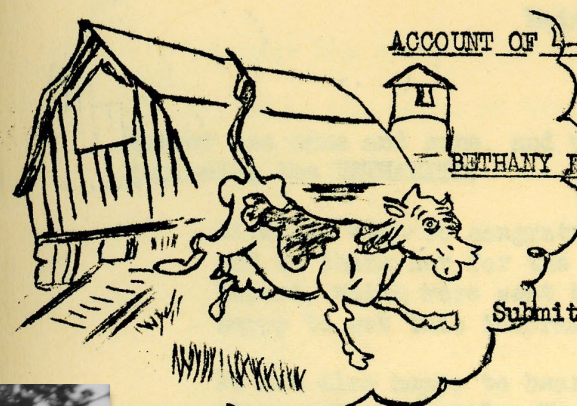
Between 1945 and 1960, more than 150 Dutch families immigrated to Eastern Nova Scotia under Canadian-Dutch government sponsorship programs; perhaps a third settled in Antigonish County. In order to qualify for farm ownership subsidies, the immigrants were required to provide proof of work experience on local properties. The Marthas sponsored fifty Dutch workers at Bethany Farm over ten years, commencing in 1951.

*For further information, consult T. Van de Sande et al., **Dutch roots / Proud Canadians: Dutch immigration to Eastern Nova Scotia** (2021)*

*Dutch dance performance, “**The Day of the Wooden Shoes**” celebration, 23 Aug. 1956.* Bethany Farm welcomed Dutch immigrant families to a day-long celebration of their heritage, marked by traditional music, dance, sports, and food.

Community Events at Bethany Farm

An account of the 4-H Calf and Garden Rally,
Antigonish County, held 9 August 1955, Bethany Farm,
The Bethanite (Oct. 1955), p. 43.



ACCOUNT OF 4-H CALF AND GARDEN CLUB RALLY

at

BETHANY FARM - AUGUST 9, 1955

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Submitted by Sister Theresa Alban

The day of the Rally dawned bright and sunny, with a gentle breeze caressing Nature. The staff were grooming the cows and calves which had been selected for judging by Mr. Bealer, assistant to the Agriculture Representative.

At about 9.30 A.M. the Club members, young boys and girls, were seen coming up the hill, bringing with them lunch cans of various colors and shape. They came from Antigonish, Afton, Havre Boucher, Heatherton, St. Andrew's and other places. By 10.30 there were about 150 assembled on the grounds, including Mr. Peter Hamilton, Animal Husbandman, Department of Agriculture, Truro, Mr. A. McLaughlin, vegetable man, of the Truro College, Miss Teresa MacLeod, Home Economist, Antigonish, Charles Douglas, Director of Extension Services, Department of Agriculture, Mr. Alexander J. MacDonald of Antigonish, and many others.

The program for the Garden Club was presided over by Mr. McLaughlin, who gave a brief talk on the importance of growing healthy vegetables, and the variety the public prefer. He explained the necessity of getting the right kind of seeds, and of weeding and praying in order to have a successful crop, e.g., staked tomatoes will give you healthier fruit and double production. Then all went to the gardens where questions were asked about the different vegetables, and the treatment for each against diseases and insects.

It was 12.45 P.M. when the group work was finished. Then they all went to Sacred Heart Grove to have lunch. By 1.30 P.M. they had dispersed to Columbus Field, where they enjoyed sports and dancing. All voted the Rally to have been a very interesting one, and the day a perfect one.

(Congratulations to you and your farm staff, Sister, and
thank you for sharing the Rally with our readers. - - Ed.)





Bethany livestock included both beef and dairy cattle; the latter were primarily Ayrshires. During the summers in the 1930s, the cattle had grazed at Antigonish Landing before the Marthas acquired additional pastures adjacent to Bethany. The herd was very productive: In 1954, **The Bethanite** reported that the Farm had produced 2,200 pounds of beef and 137,000 pounds of milk.

Sister Marie Trinitas (Clarine) O'Leary with dog Chum, feeding cattle, Bethany barn, 12 Oct. 1964

Bethany Farm Heritage

Bethany Farm struggled in the 1960s. Worried by financial losses, the Marthas downsized their farming operations. Livestock production ceased: the remaining cattle were sold in 1969; the hennery and piggery closed in 1970. The pastures and barn were leased to local farmers.

In 2013, the Marthas sponsored the [Bethany New Growers program](#), a mentoring program for aspiring farmers interested in sustainable production and market gardening.

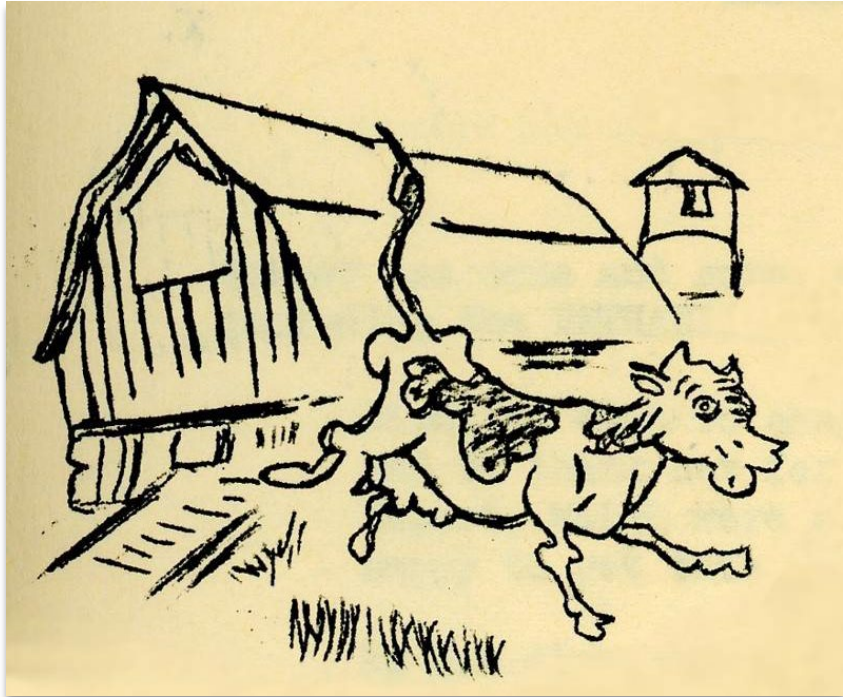
Bethany Farm was more than a system of food production. Connection to the Land as reflected in the Farm and the surrounding Bethany Grounds have rooted the Marthas in a Spirituality linking Ecology and Social Justice.



*Bethany New Growers **Michael Overmars** and **Colleen Freake** harvesting crops at former Bethany Farm, fall 2015.*

Notes

Rev. Duncan J. Rankin (1887-1954, Mabou) enrolled as a student at St. F.X. in 1897 and provided a description of the “*rural*” character of the staff and students at St. Francis Xavier University: “*The students and professors were all country-born and used to work on the farm. They delighted in taking a hand in doing work ...beautifying the grounds....trees were carried from surrounding farms.*” (Extract, unpublished typescript, 1949).



There is little information about the original St. F.X. Farm. James Cameron noted that it was located south of Xavier Hall and worked primarily by hired men, although staff and students assisted during harvesting. During university expansion (1895-7), a separate dining room was established for the farm workers; preparing and serving their meals became a Martha responsibility. In 1907, St. F.X. purchased Fernwood, a 280-acre estate, just north of Antigonish, that they renamed **Mount Cameron** in honour of Rev. John Cameron, Bishop of Antigonish and Chancellor of the university. There, the Marthas again provided meals to the hired hands until 1928. Mount Cameron also served as the Diocesan Home for Retired Priests.

For further information about the Dutch-Martha relationship, consult T. Van de Sande et al., **Dutch roots / Proud Canadians: Dutch immigration to Eastern Nova Scotia** (2021), particularly pp.150-3.