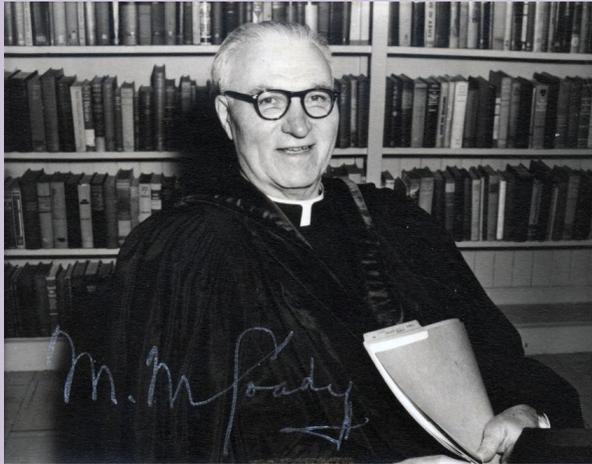


# Who Were Coady and Tompkins?

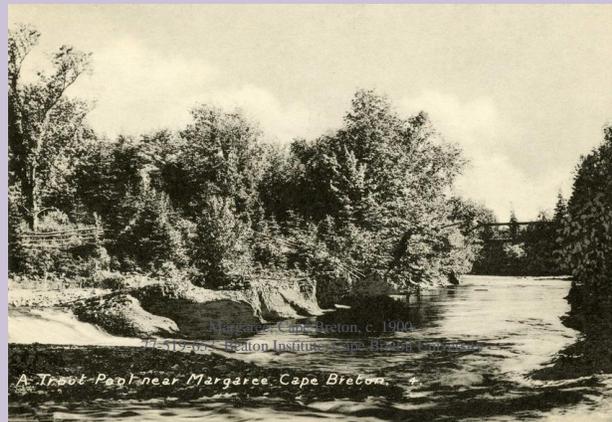


Dr. M. M. Coady, c. 1950.  
77-672-806. Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University.

**Dr. Moses Michael Coady** was born on 3 January 1882 in Margaree Valley, Cape Breton. He was the eldest of 11 children and grew up on a small farm. At the age of 15, Coady attended school and was taught by Chris J. Tompkins, an older cousin and the brother of James (Jimmy) Tompkins. After high school, Coady attended teacher training and worked in Margaree for two years. Following this, he attended the Provincial Normal school in Truro, Nova Scotia, and became a teacher and principal at Margaree Forks.

In 1903, Coady registered at St. Francis Xavier University (St. FX) in Antigonish and graduated in 1905 with a bachelor's degree, successfully achieving a grade A teaching licence. Later that year, he was accepted to the Urban College in Rome, where he studied Theology and Philosophy until 1910. Upon returning to Nova Scotia, he was appointed as a teacher at St. FX's university high school. He was awarded an MA in Education in 1914 and took over from Jimmy Tompkins as principal of the St. Francis Xavier high school. During this period Moses Coady began to visualize a community development movement and to reflect on the ways that the economic and social status of Nova Scotians might be improved.

A priest and educator, Coady helped lead the Antigonish Movement, a people's movement for economic and social justice that began in Nova Scotia in the 1920s. In 1930 he was appointed to lead the Extension Department of St. FX and oversaw the delivery of a series of programs focused on addressing the needs of the surrounding fishing, mining, and farming communities. His main contributions included extending cooperative development throughout the Maritimes and helping to build a network of credit unions across Canada from the 1930s to the early 1950s.



The main objective of St. FX's Extension Department was to improve the "economic, social, educational and religious conditions of the people of Eastern Nova Scotia." The Extension Department underpinned the "Antigonish Movement." Following the end of WWII, and influenced by this movement, the Maritimes had 431 credit unions, with assets of \$8m (\$25m in loans), 200 co-op stores, with a business of \$10m, 1 Fishery wholesale organization, 71 houses built cooperatively, with 170 still under construction, and many farmer groups and producer co-ops doing business that reached several million.

Less than six months after his death in 1959, the Coady International Institute was established at St. FX to honour his vision of helping people around the world to become "masters of their own destiny." Dedicated to education, innovation and action, the Coady International Institute has been promoting community self-reliance since it began educating leaders from around the world in 1959.

*Education can supply the dynamics for social progress.* - Moses Coady



**Rev. James J. “Father Jimmy” Tompkins** was born on 7 September 1870 in Margaree Forks, Cape Breton. His upbringing there had a profound impact on his life’s work. It is most likely the reason for him having had such an appreciation of and sympathy for the problems and concerns of working people. His goal was to improve the circumstances of Nova Scotians, especially those living in rural communities, through ideas and action. “‘Ideas have hands and feet.’ With the right kind of education, ideas could work for people, help them to understand their problems, find solutions.”

Following his education at St. FX, he studied in Rome and was ordained in 1902. Returning to St. FX to serve as the vice-rector, Tompkins showed his passion for scholarship and the power of ideas, advocating for adult education as the key to social reform Cape Breton.

Tompkins’ time at St. FX was career defining and his work with the Extension Department affected the lives of countless people throughout Nova Scotia. With his open-mindedness and his search for solutions, Tompkins’ classroom became the epicenter for lively and radical discussions on how to reduce the suffering

of the region. Father Jimmy, as he was affectionately called by those close to him, became known for his power of persuasion and for the passion he had for a number of social issues.

However, Tompkins’ advocacy was not unanimously supported at the university. This opposition resulted in him being relocated by the bishop to parishes in Canso and Reserve Mines. The abject poverty and lack of education that plagued these communities upset him. A believer in the power of ideas to motivate social change, Tompkins set about working to help the residents improve their quality of life. A major component of this endeavour, as Tompkins saw it, was in engaging with the local community and listening to what the people had to say. Recognizing their hunger for knowledge, he loaned them books from his personal collection and established, in St. Joseph’s parish in Reserve Mines, the immensely popular “People’s Library.”

After his death on 5 May 1953, Tompkins was buried in St. Joseph’s parish cemetery. His colleagues recall him as having been “an effective and persistent prod, who afflicted the comfortable and complacent, a priest-reformer and a visionary.” Those attending his funeral said this of character and accomplishments: “By heaven, there was one hell of a man.”

*“The time for learning anything is the time when you need it.”*

- Jimmy Tompkins



## Knowledge for the People

Coady and Tompkins valued bringing education and literacy to rural communities and they paid little attention to class, occupation, or gender. In 1920 Tompkins penned his most notable pamphlet, *Knowledge for the People*, wherein he argued for the extension of education beyond elite groups and for knowledge to be disseminated to the “average citizen.” Tompkins believed that the education and self-empowerment of adults was the key to achieving social justice. Developing education was central to the development of cooperative movements, which aimed to extend economic prosperity.

*“It is the duty of Adult education to make the mute vocal, and to make the blind see.”* - Jimmy Tompkins

## Kitchen Forums

Kitchens are the heart of the home, but they can be so much more than that – places of thought, discussion, and planning. It was in these settings that Coady and Tompkins strategized and discussed options for combatting the inequality faced by rural communities. They worked with communities and depended on the input of the locals to come up with workable solutions for challenges such as how to get better prices for fish or how to plan and build proper housing. The scope of the problems that Coady and Tompkins tackled shows just how effective these kitchen meetings were. It is important to note that these kitchen meetings were not the end result, but an essential first step in the planning process. “After the kitchen meetings ... people would talk about it more among themselves.” We can see kitchen meetings as promoting community involvement, a place to have their voices and concerns heard, and most importantly, a starting point for further work.

A more recent example of the power of the kitchen was the Margaree Save Our Schools campaign (Margaree S.O.S.) of the 1990s when schools were being closed due to declining populations. The proposal to send students from Margaree to Inverness was met with fury and after a public meeting to determine a strategy, the S.O.S. campaign was born. This movement would not have seen the success it did without the support of the entire community and with actions such as a student strike, a petition signed by 1,200 people from Margaree, and media outreach. These tactics delayed the closure of the community’s elementary and high schools and forced the school board to build a new school in Terre Noire. It was an imperfect solution, but one that ensured that children could be educated locally. The 52 ‘Kitchen Forums’ that we held throughout the community were pivotal and ‘galvanized the Margaree community with a common resolve.’ These meetings, held in people’s kitchens, were used to organize and discuss what needed to be done to save the school. It was a way to raise awareness and to provide solutions. These forums were inspired by the early meetings of Coady and Tompkins held across Cape Breton that aimed to empower communities.

Kitchen meetings are about inclusiveness. Small communities still face major challenges because of their small populations and they often do not get the outside attention required to help solve them. This is where the kitchen forum is most useful: enabling a community to come together and speak with one voice.

This material was prepared by the students of the 2018 Community Leadership Course (History Department) at Saint Mary’s University. Supervisor: Dr. S. Karly Kehoe. Students: Sarah Budgell; Jake Bullen; Lisa Bunyan; Jenelle Reid; and Trisha Turner.