



Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall

# This Week in History

October 26, 2015

## The Birth and Ordination of Our First Bishop

The Diocese of Alexandria came into being on January 23, 1890. The first bishop of the newly created diocese was Father Alexander Macdonell who was ordained nine months later on **October 26, 1890**.

Alexander was born in Lochiel on **November 1, 1833**, to James Macdonell and Christina MacDonald, who were farmers. His parents, who were devout Scottish Catholics, named their son after the first bishop of Upper Canada.

Following his education at the local common school, he moved to Ottawa to study at the College of Bytown. Three years later he enrolled at Regiopolis College in Kingston, where he studied theology. In 1862, he was ordained to the priesthood. He was initially assigned to a parish in Gananoque, but within the year, Bishop Horan sent him to his home parish in Lochiel.



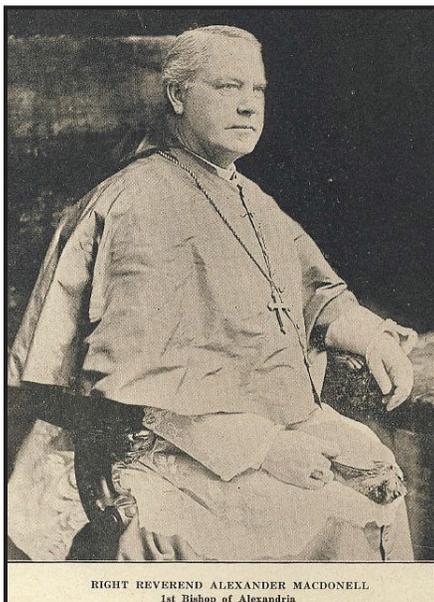
MOST REV. ALEXANDER MACDONELL  
Seventh Pastor — 1879-1905  
First Bishop — 1890-1905

He stayed in Lochiel for 16 years before being reassigned in 1879, to the growing town of Alexandria, where he took charge of the parish of St. Finnan's. It soon became apparent that the church building was too small, so Father Alexander initiated the construction of a new church. It was this church that he chose for his cathedral following his ordination as bishop.

At the time of Bishop Alexander's ordination, the Diocese of Alexandria had 21,550 Catholics, 10 parishes and 12 priests.

During his episcopacy, Bishop Alexander oversaw the construction of the Hotel Dieu Hospital (with the bulk of the work being done by five sisters of the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph) and St Paul's Home for the Aged Poor in Cornwall, the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Alexandria and a new episcopal palace located across from St. Finnan's.

During this same era, the number of French speaking Catholics significantly increased, particularly in Cornwall. In 1892, the decision was made that La Nativité would serve the French speaking population. Although the French in Alexandria also sought their own parish, this project was left to his successor, Bishop William Macdonell.



RIGHT REVEREND ALEXANDER MACDONELL  
1st Bishop of Alexandria

Eventually the stresses of the office began to take their toll and Bishop Alexander's last three years were spent in ill health. In 1905, he was hospitalized at Montreal's Hotel Dieu where he died on May 29th, 1905.



Diocesan Clergy Day - 1895



Pectoral Cross and ring belonging to Bishop Alexander