

## **Admiral of the Court: Sir Alexander Croke in Nova Scotia, 1801-1815**

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### **Abstract**

Maritime conflicts were among the first modern international law problems. In North America in the early 1800s, one of the pre-eminent fora addressing these disputes was the Nova Scotia Court of Vice-Admiralty. The jurists on this court deeply influenced the development of a proto-Canadian approach to international law. One jurist, Sir Alexander Croke, a British born judge who served on the court from 1801-1815, is of particular importance. Croke was a profoundly conservative presence in the Nova Scotia colonial administration. He was deeply loyal to the British Empire and rigidly adhered to the letter of British law, at the expense of Nova Scotian interests. In his rulings he aimed to reflect the literal meaning of Imperial statute, and willfully ignored political and economic realities on the ground. The Nova Scotian approach to international law was therefore constrained to a narrow interpretation of British dictates regardless of how those dictates might negatively impact Nova Scotia's welfare. The precedents set by Croke delayed the development of Nova Scotia itself into a self governing entity capable of protecting its own interests on the international stage, and helped shape the slower development of Canada, vis-à-vis other nations, into an independent international presence.

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