

CROKE, Nicholas, Carpenter and architect; b. c. 1800 probably in New Ross, County Wexford, Ireland; m. on 8 August, 1821 Mary Flynn of St. John's by whom he had three sons² and one daughter³; d. 8 December 1850 at St. John's⁴.

Nicholas Croke probably came out to St. John's as a carpenter (the trade his eldest son later followed)⁵ fairly soon before his marriage in 1821. Like his fellow carpenter and fellow Wexford man, Patrick Kough, he must have attained some standing in the building trade for, by 1836, he was styling himself "architect".⁶ Despite the title only one work of his is known: the Orphan Asylum School, built 1827⁷, portico added 1844⁸, demolished 1880.⁹ As a member of the Benevolent Irish Society, the sponsors of the school, Croke had submitted a set of plans and, on the basis of these, been asked to join the building committee. When the contractor who was awarded the tender was unable to complete the work Croke was asked to take it on and did so, completing the building for the society.¹⁰ A straight forward hip-roofed example of vernacular Georgian architecture, the school was, according to Bishop Hurley, "one of the neatest buildings in the city, and was much admired by the typical 'Out-herbar-man,' on his annual visit to the capital."¹¹

In politics Croke took a position which was quite independent of the majority of the Catholic population though possibly very dependant on the interests of his trade and his purse. The Roman Catholic Bishop, Dr. Fleming, was a strong supporter of the liberal politicians William Carson and Patrick Morris.¹² Few were the Catholics who pursued an independent line and attempted to run on their own. Patrick Kough did and so did Michael McKeon Lillo (whose business suffered as a consequence)¹³ and Croke put his name to statements supporting both.¹⁴ His association with the conservative faction is also seen in his opposition to Carson's attempt to create a municipal corporation for St. John's in 1834.¹⁵ These alignments and the views they imply can, in part, be seen as self-serving. To any contractor the mercantile conservative party, with its own contracts as well as its ties to Government House and government contracts, was a necessary alliance.

One curious aspect of Croke's life is that he does not appear to have owned any property in Newfoundland - a somewhat unusual situation for a man of his standing and that time.¹⁶

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