

Peter Crerar

Peter Crerar was a Scottish-Nova Scotian and a civil engineer, who was responsible for the first railway in British North America and the first standard gauge railroad in North America. It was in 1836 that he began to show a great interest in railways, via his lengthy and concerned letter he wrote about the proposed railway from Halifax to Windsor. It was during that same year that Stellarton had decided to build a railway from Albion mines to its loading grounds in East River. Peter Crerar was given the task of planning out the railway and was nominated by locomotive builder George Stephenson to execute and supervise the plans. It was in George's opinion that, the person who prepared the drawings could execute them as well.

The railway took three years to complete and was ready for traffic in 1839. The track measured out to 6 miles (10 kilometres) in length and was so nearly straight that the least radius of its curves was 1" — 300 feet. While the railroad was being constructed, three locomotives were being built in England by Timothy Hackworth. They were landed at Pictou in May 1839 and brought up the East River in lighters, towed by a Mining Company steamship. The locomotives were Samson, Hercules, and John Buddle. Later in 1845 he was a member of a local committee in Pictou County formed to support the proposed Halifax and Quebec Railway project. In 1851, as part of the first phase of planning for the Nova Scotia Railway, he carried out surveys for a proposed route north from Truro to Pictou.

Today the Albion Mines Railway is commemorated by the "Samson Trail" following the route of the old railway from the Nova Scotia Museum of Industry along the East River towards Abercrombie. The railway's locomotive Samson is preserved at the museum and is the oldest surviving locomotive in Canada.