

93 Model Ave., Hopewell - Fetter Saw Mill (1874)

Rev. 8/27/2022 c - D. Dixon

The John Finney & A. G. Fetter Steam Saw & Feed Mill started operations in Hopewell in 1874, on the triangle of land at Model Avenue and Louellen Street. It was purchased in 1919 by R. Scott Kise, who operated it until c1927. The mill buildings were demolished in 1945; no sign of it remains.

1870s - Lambertville Spoke Mfg Co

c1869 - John Finney buys Thatcher spoke factory
 Moves from Stockton to Lambertville
 1912 - Lambertville Spoke closed

1874 - Mercer & Somerset Railroad Opened

Ran along Model Ave. in Hopewell
 1876 - Delaware and Bound Brook Railroad Opened

1874 - Finney & Fetter Steam Saw & Feed Mill Established

John Finney, A. G. (Anthony) Fetter

1893 - Mill Well Water - Hopewell Water Co.

1907 - Boro buys Water Company

1894 - A. G. Fetter Hopewell Saw & Feed Mill

1894 - Death of John Finney

1895 - Mill destroyed by fire - rebuilt

1895 - Fire destroyed mill, lumber sheds, products, supplies
 Replaced by second mill
 1910 - Fire destroyed only large barn and stable

1911 - Death of A. G. Fetter - Run by Fetter estate

1912 - Discussions to buy for cereal company

1919 - Estate Public Sale - to R. Scott Kise

1919 - Robert Scott Kise buys property
 Continues operating the saw mill

c1927 - Mill closed (Kise)

c1927 - Kise closes the mill operation

1945 - Mill demolished (Kise)

c1943 - Mill wrecked by serious fire
 Kise continued to use portion as wagon-house
 1945 - Mill demolished



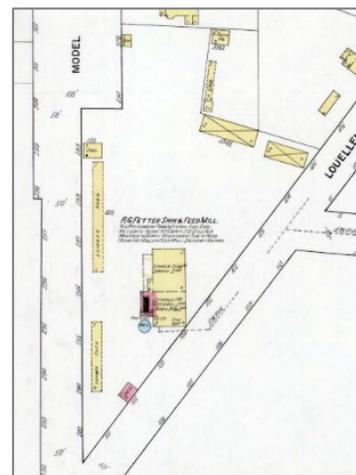
Original Mill [Fowler 1887]



2nd Mill [HHH 1897, Hw 1909]



2nd Mill [Elaine Zeltner, n/d]



2nd Mill [Sanborn 1912]

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The Finney & Fetter Story

The Finney & Fetter Steam Saw & Feed Mill started operations in Hopewell in 1874. [LR 12/16/1874] It continued in use as a saw mill and grist / feed mill until c1927. [Sanborn 1927, Humble 1947] It was "the largest of Hopewell's [Township] sawmills and enjoyed an international market for its products." [HAHG 1992].

The steam-operated mill stood on the triangle of land at the corner of Model Avenue and Louellen Street in Hopewell Borough, now containing 93 Model Ave. and with Hopewell Borough Pump House No. 4 at the intersection.



Original Mill Buildings [Fowler 1887]

The two- to three-acre property included the mill complex for sawing lumber and grinding grain (roughly 50 x 100 feet), plus outlying sheds for lumber and other uses. [Ind Dir NJ 1918] The saw mill manufactured car, wagon, and ship timber, mostly for export, shipped all around the world. The mill provided jobs and business for the Hopewell area, "Hiring up to 25 men, they cut and planed quality hardwood lumber from the Sourland ridge, and ground farmer's grain." [Hw 125th 2016]

John Finney (1829-1894) was "one of the wealthiest and most influential citizens of Lambertville, N. J." [Syracuse Daily Standard 1894] He operated the Lambertville Spoke Manufacturing Company, after buying the Thatcher spoke factory in Stockton circa 1869 and moving it to Lambertville. [LR 1/17/1894]

A. G. Fetter (1835-1911) was born in Germany, and came to U. S. when he was 14 years old. He was first located in Stockton and learned the lumber business there. [TET 1/9/1911] When the saw mill opened, Fetter moved to Hopewell and focused on the operation there, while Finney lived in Lambertville and focused on the spoke business. [LR 4/7/1875]

After the death of Finney in 1894, Finny continued the business, then known as the A. G. Fetter Saw & Feed Mill.

In 1895, a major fire destroyed the mill and adjoining lumber sheds, along with stored finished wood products and supplies of corn, oats, feed, and bran. The result was an uninsured loss of \$20,000, but the mill was then rebuilt. [HH 10/29/1895] Another fire in 1910 destroyed a large barn and stable. The barn was rebuilt the following month. [HH 10/12/1910, 11/2/1910]

Fetter died in 1910, and his family continued to run the business. The property and buildings were finally sold by the estate in 1919, and was purchased by R. Scott Kise. [HH 2/12/1919, 2/19/1919] Kise continued to run the saw mill until around 1927. [Sanborn 1927, Humble 1947] In the early 1940s, the mill was wrecked by a fire, and it was finally demolished in 1945. [Humble 1947]

John Finney and A. J. Fetter

John Finney (1829-1894) was "one of the wealthiest and most influential citizens of Lambertville, N. J.," and was reportedly "worth \$250,000 in cash besides owning much real estate." [Syracuse Daily Standard 1894] Finney operated the Lambertville Spoke Manufacturing Company, after buying the Thatcher spoke factory in Stockton circa 1869 and moving it to Lambertville. [LR 1/17/1894]

Lambertville Spoke manufactured products for carriage manufacturers and wheelwrights, including wheel spokes and rims, and felloes (the outer rim of a wheel, to which the spokes are inserted).

The Lambertville Spoke Manufacturing Company was "one of the largest mills of the kind in the country, having branch agencies all over the civilized world." [Syracuse Daily Standard 1894] The company was located on 3 acres at Union and Elm streets, with buildings 200 by 60 feet and 8 stories high, plus basement. The site also included sheds capable of holding one million rough spokes, and a brick dry-house to hold up to 150,000 spokes. The facility was run by a 80 hp engine and has 40 workers. It shipped products all over the world, including Europe, Australia, South America, West Indies, and even California and Canada. [LR 10/29/1882]

Lambertville Spoke consumed massive amounts of wood. One ad called for 200 cords of timber. [LR 7/23/1879] (One cord is 8 x 4 x 4 feet, 128 cubic feet, and typically between 2000 and 3000 pounds. A railroad box car can hold over 5,000 cubic feet and 220,000 pounds - typically 3 to 4 truckloads.)

Lambertville Spoke continued after Finney's death in 1894, was reorganized in 1898 and 1911, and finally was shut down in 1912. [LR 1/5/1898, TET 9/18/1911, LR 8/16/1912]



Lambertville Spoke Ad
[LR 7/23/1879]

Anthony G. Fetter (1835-1911), born Anton Gabriel Vetter in Germany [HVHS 2008], came to U. S. when he was 14 years old. He was first located in Stockton and learned the lumber business there. [TET 1/9/1911] When the saw mill opened, Fetter moved to Hopewell and focused on the operation there, while Finney lived in Lambertville and focused on the spoke business. [LR 4/7/1875]

Fetter was treasurer of the Hopewell Water Company from its founding until it was purchased by the borough. He also was president of both the Hopewell building and loan associations. [TET 1/9/1911]

The Mill Business

The Finney & Fetter saw mill manufactured car, wagon, and ship timber, mostly for export, shipped all around the world:

Lumber used for the New York Central docks in New York harbor was supplied through the Finney & Fetter saw-mill. The rudder stock for the "Meteor," a vessel built for Kaiser Wilhelm and christened by Alice Roosevelt, daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt, also came from this mill, while shipments to Australia and all parts of Europe, as well as England, were fairly frequent. But there was business nearby, too. Thousands of axe and hammer handles, made of Jersey hickory, were shaped and delivered to the Germantown Tool Co., Philadelphia; while apple wood went into Disston saw handles. Then prior to World War I, the mill handled a number of orders for walnut stock, cut to specified sizes. The wood was obtained largely in New Jersey, but some was bought as far away as Canada. Then came the war and the discovery followed that the walnut needed for gun stocks by the United States was not available, as Germany had been buying it up in advance. The mill also turned out hundreds of wagon wheels before the days of the auto.

- *Be It Ever So Humble, Dean Ashton, 1947*

From the trees of the land [Fetter] owned, he made fellowes and whiffle trees used in the carriages of the Czar of Russia.

The saw mill made the church pews used in the Hopewell Presbyterian Chapel in 1877.

- *Hopewell's Past, Betty Gantz, 1987 - Information from Bob Fetter*

Finney & Fetter also were involved in other types of businesses, including buying oats and hay, and having "thoroughbred Alderney cows and calves of both sexes always for sale." [HH 9/21/1892]

The Mill in Hopewell

The mill also was involved in other Hopewell activities.

The first telephone in Hopewell is said to have been in the saw mill (late 1890s): "It was a one-way line between the mill and the railroad station. When cars arrived at the station, they could ring the mill and let the owners know that they were available for loading with timber, shipped from the mill to all parts of the world." [Humble 1947]

Fetter also is credited with originating Hopewell's first street lighting system. "It consisted of kerosene lamps that were cleaned daily. Eventually, utility company lines were extended into the Borough." [Humble 1947]

The sawmill also used its team of mules to keep the dirt streets passable: "A.G. Fetter keeps Mercer St. well leveled ... with eight mules and a big scraper." [HH 4/19/1882] "They had 16 of the best and largest mules! They were also used to smooth the muddy streets! No macadam, concrete, or even good stone streets then!" [Gantz 1987]

—A. G. Fetter keeps Mercer street well leveled down with the scraper. With eight mules and a big scraper good work can be done.

Street Scraping [HH 4/19/1882]

Finney & Fetter Mill (1874)

The Finney & Fetter Steam Saw & Feed Mill started operations in Hopewell in 1874. [LR 12/16/1874] The mill stood at the corner of Model and Louellen Street in Hopewell Borough, on the triangle now occupied by the Hopewell Borough Pump House. The property was acquired from Joseph M. Phillips. [DB 102-247, 1874-04-08]

A. G. Fetter moved to Hopewell from Brookvale in the first half of 1875, after the first calendar year of operation of the Finney & Fetter Mill. [LR 12/16/1874] Fetter was in charge of the Hopewell operation, while Finney lived in Lambertville and was in charge of the spoke works there. The business then had 13 employees, and "has all the work they could do since they started." [LR 4/7/1875]

In 1881, Finney & Fetter installed a new 65 hp engine from the Lambertville Iron Works. [LR 3/23/1881] The company then had about 20 employees. [HH 11/9/1881]

In 1882, the company had 15 employees. [HH 3/2/1892] Finney & Fetter was advertising to buy oats and hay, and having "thoroughbred Alderney cows and calves of both sexes always for sale." [HH 9/21/1892]

In 1883, Finney & Fetter erected a new lumber shed for use at the mill. [HH 4/20/1893]

John Finney died in January 1894, at age 65. [LR 1/17/1894] A. G. Fetter continued the business under his own name, becoming known as the A. G. Fetter Saw & Feed Mill or the A. G. Fetter Hopewell Mill. [DB 197-473, 1894-09-11; DB 206-512, 1896-02-01]

The company was not just working on logs in Hopewell; that fall Finney & Fetter "shipped two car-loads of logs from to Jersey City ... from the Doylestown depot." [LR 10/10/1894]

In addition, in October 1894 the company apparently disposed of its dairy herd and operation, through a "Mammoth Sale of Jersey Cattle" - offering its entire herd of 88 head, plus a work horse, and milk cans and dairy supplies. [LR 10/3/1894].

The Hopewell Water Company (1890)

A private Hopewell Water Company was incorporated in 1890 by a group including A. G. Fetter to construct a water system for the borough. A. G. Fetter was one of the original group, and became treasurer of the company. [TET 9/13/1890] The Borough eventually took over the Water Company in 1905. [HH 9/20/1905]

In 1893, the Water Company arranged to procure water from the spring of J. M. Phillips, which was then pumped to the reservoir by the Finney & Fetter steam engine. [HH 8/3/1893]

By 1890, there was a well next to the Finney & Fetter mill building [Scarlett 1890] The well was connected to the town water pipe running down Louellen Street, and provided a capacity of 275 gallons per minute, used to supply the reservoir "in time of need." [Sanborn 1912]



Hopewell Water
[HH 9/20/1905]

A. G. Fetter Mill - Fire (1894)

In 1895, a major fire destroyed the mill and adjoining lumber sheds, along with stored finished wood products and supplies of corn, oats, feed, and bran. The result was an uninsured loss of \$20,000, but the mill was then rebuilt.

The fire burned quickly, and the Hopewell fire companies struggled to get water on the blaze - the hoses were too short to reach the Creamery pond (at Mercer Street), they could not suction from a well, and pulling muddy water from a ditch broke the engine. [HH 10/29/1895]

The [fire]men worked faithfully nearly all day trying to extinguish the flames but another call had to be made on Saturday evening and again on Sunday evening and Monday morning before the fire was all extinguished.

The fire started in the main part of the mill and spread with rapidity to every part, and the adjoining lumber sheds, in a few minutes. There were about 3,000 bushels of corn and oats in the mill besides several times of feed and bran, while the wareroom contained a large lot of manufactured stuff which was very valuable. Among the lot was a carload of felloes ready to be shipped, and the adjoining shed also contains several feet of sawed lumber.

For 21 years the mill has stood as the chief industry of Hopewell, and its home in buzz of rapid move inks machinery has sang a song of pleasure to many of the laboring man who is fed his family from the income thereof - but, alas, it lay in a heap of ashes and is very still.

- Hopewell Herald, 10/29/1895

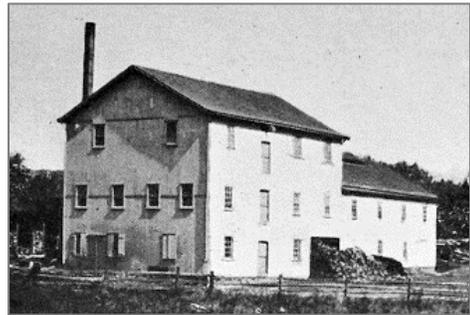
A new, second mill building was then constructed with a different design.

Another fire in 1910 destroyed a large mill barn and stable. The barn was rebuilt the following month. [HH 10/12/1910, 11/2/1910]

This time, the fire companies were able to control the blaze and save the adjoining buildings because of their access to a better water supply:

"The hose was attached directly to the plug and a stream of water with more force than has even been seen in Hopewell before, was played upon the flames without the use of an engine, and they were promptly extinguished while burning under full headway."

- Hopewell Herald, 10/12/1910



Second Mill Building [HHH 1897, Hw 1909]

Fetter Estate (1911)

A. C. Fetter died in January 1911, and his family continued to run the business, while also looking for opportunities to sell it to settle the estate. [Indus Dir NJ 1901-1918]

In 1912, for example, former mayor Pierson and others raised subscription for a new cereal company to take over the mill, increase its output, and also take half the mill to market a high grade flour and a new breakfast cereal. The food products were from the formulas of Professor George A. Keene, "editor of Health Magazine, and a noted food specialist." [TET 10/8/1912]

In 1912 and 1918, the property was listed for sale in editions of The Industrial Directory of New Jersey.

In 1919, after being in the Fetter family for almost half a century, the property and buildings were finally sold by the estate in a public auction, which included the mill, machinery, barns, a team of mules, and related supplies. [HH 2/12/1919]



Public Sale [HH 2/12/1919]

R. Scott Kise (1919)

The mill property was purchased in 1919 by R. Scott Kise for \$2860. [HH 2/19/1919] This was below the pre-sale assessment of \$3500. [HH 5/31/1922]

Richard Scott Kise (1856 -1949) was born on a farm on Rileyville Road / Hopewell-Wertsville Road one mile north of Hopewell. His father, Bloomfield H. Kise, operated the Kise Steam Saw Mill there from the 1860s until after 1880. [HAHG 1990] R. Scott Kise then ran the family farm for many years, and later was road supervisor of Hopewell Township Twp for many years. [HH 5/11/1949]

The saw mill belonging to the A. G. Fetter estate was sold at public sale on last Saturday afternoon to R. Scott Kise, of near the borough. The price was \$2,860. The mill is an old landmark in Hopewell and had been in the Fetter family for nearly fifty years.

Kise buys saw mill [HH 2/19/1919]

Kise also was a timber dealer in his younger days. The newspaper article celebrating his 92nd birthday attributed his longevity to his "strong physical constitution" developed while engaged in the "rigorous job of log hauling from the Sourland Mountains" (and from farming). [HH 1/7/1948]

Kise continued to run the saw mill until around 1927. The mill is marked as "Not in operation" in the 1927 and 1935 Sanborn maps. And Ashton places the closing of the mill as "about 15 years ago" from when he wrote in 1945. [Humble 1947]

Ashton then reports that the mill was wrecked by a serious fire "several years ago" (i.e., around 1943, before [Sanborn 1935]). Kise continued to use a portion as a wagon-house. The building was then demolished In July 1945; "the former landmark soon will be no more." [Humble 1947]

The former landmark soon will be no more ... There was a time when the mill was the site of a thriving industry, with shipments that went all over the world. Then, too, the factory whistle, in the days before radios were known, used to be the signal for housewives and others to set their kitchen clocks at noon each day.

- Be It Ever So Humble, Dean Ashton, 1947

The Mill Property

The Finney & Fetter Saw & Feed Mill was located at the corner of Model and Louellen Street in Hopewell Borough, on the triangle that now contains the Hopewell Borough Pump House No. 4 on the corner.

Since the mill was operated by steam power, not running water, it could be located close to the Mercer & Somerset railroad tracks, which ran roughly along the path of the current Model Avenue. The M&S started operations in 1874, and the M&S train station was a block down at Mercer Street (see Mercer Atlas 1875).

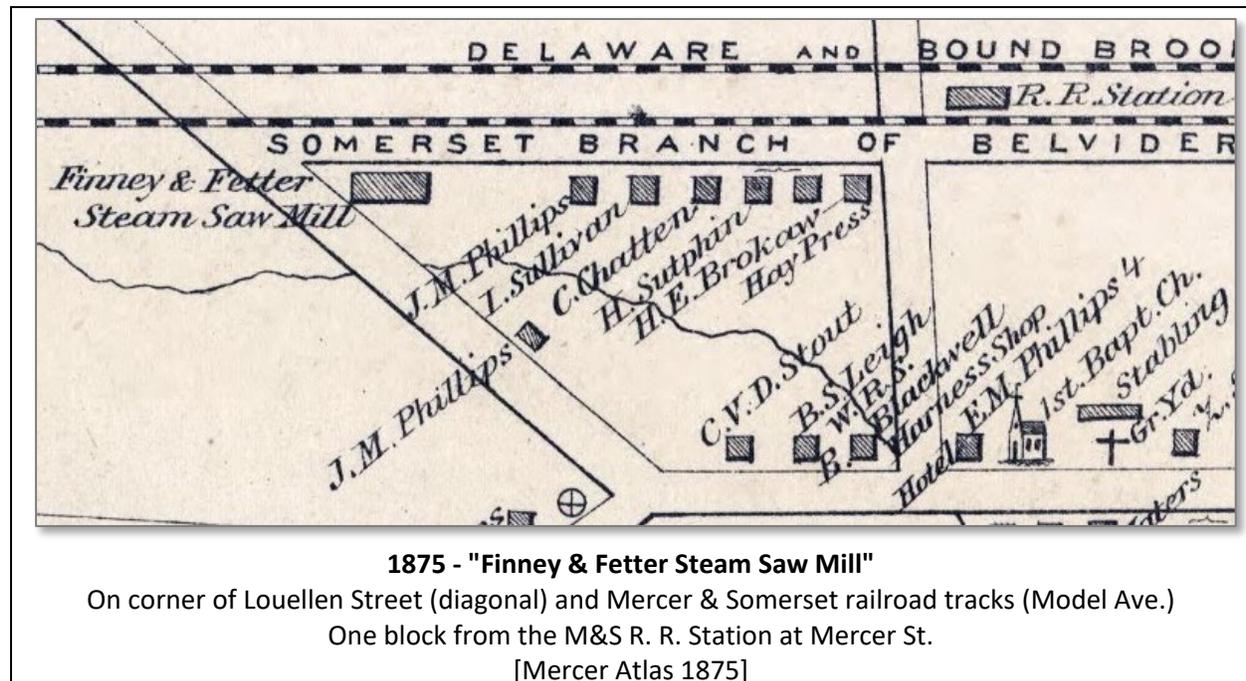


Hopewell Pump House today, at corner of Model (left) and Louellen (right)

The expansion of the regional railroad network greatly impacted sawmilling in Hopewell because improved transportation connections encouraged the growth of large mills sited on the railroads to allow for more effective distribution of their product. Lumberyards were built alongside the railroads in Hopewell, Pennington, and Titusville to serve as local distribution points for timber products brought in from elsewhere.

...The Finney and Fetter Steam Mill in Hopewell Borough, attained a size and a capacity far beyond those of its local water powered predecessors. This mill ... was the largest of Hopewell's [Township] sawmills and enjoyed an international market for its products.

[HAHG 1992]



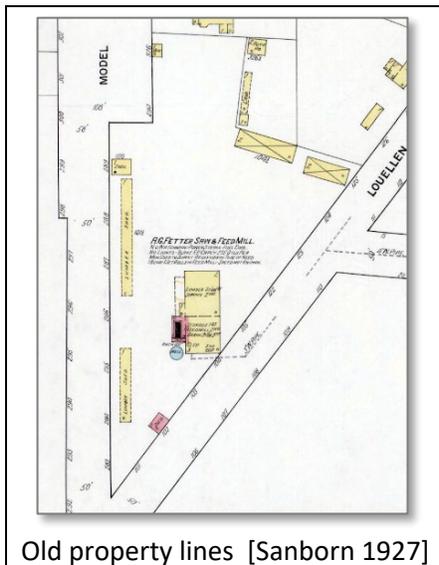
The property included the mill complex for sawing lumber and milling grain, plus outlying sheds for lumber and other uses. [Ind Dir NJ 1918] The company also maintained mules and wagons. [HH 2/12/1919]

The property shown in the 1930 aerial matches the 1927 Sanborn map - with the mill building, two large sheds down Louellen, one smaller remaining shed towards Model, and a small shed on Louellen closer to the intersection with Model.

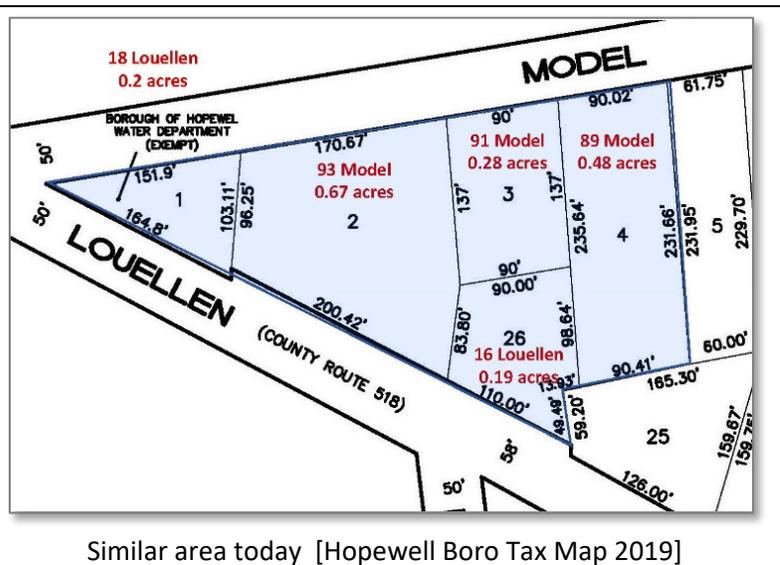


1932 - Property with Second Mill - Looking NE from Louellen to Model and train tracks
[Hopewell Aerial 1932]

The property as outlined in the Sanborn fire maps includes around 1.8 acres when matched to current property lines (highlighted area). Contemporaneous accounts describe the property as two acres. [Ind Dir NJ 1918]



Old property lines [Sanborn 1927]



Similar area today [Hopewell Boro Tax Map 2019]

When the property was sold at public auction in 1919, however, it was described as "about three acres." It included a "large mill in good repair" and two barns. The description also touted "an everlasting supply of soft water." The sale also included a team of mules, wagons, and related equipment. [HH 2/12/1919]

The Mill Building

The original mill building from 1874 was totally destroyed by fire in 1895, and was replaced with the second mill building, which operated until around 1930, and then was demolished in 1945.

First Mill Building (1874)

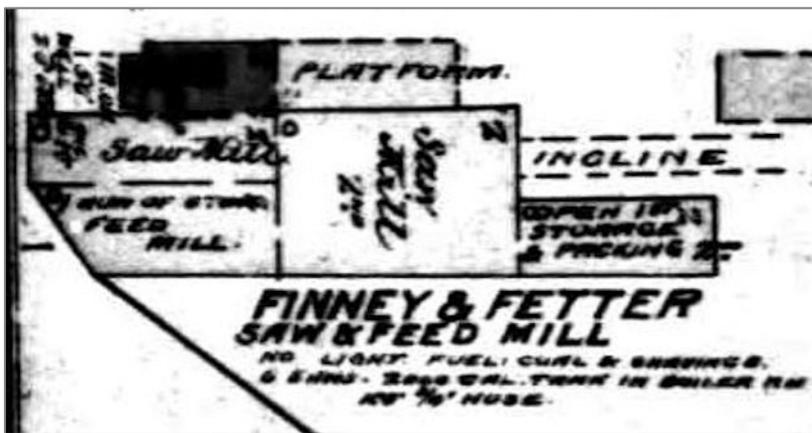
The original mill building operated from its construction in 1874 until it was destroyed by fire in 1895.

In the saw mill, logs were cut into planks, planks were cut into lengths and then sawed into other products, including felloes and hatchet handle bolts. Leftover material then was used to feed the furnace. The mill also sold left-over firewood. [LR 4/17/1875]

In 1881, the mill installed a new 65 hp engine from the Lambertville Iron Works. [LR 3/23/1881]
For the second mill, the 1919 Sanborn map showed a 75 hp engine. In 1919, when the property was sold at public auction, the machinery at the mill included a 100 hp power boiler, a 90 hp engine, and roller mills for grinding grain. [HH 2/12/1919]



Fowler 1887 -
"Finney & Fetter
Steam Saw Mill"



Scarlett 1890 -

West end (Left)
- Top - Saw Mill
- Bottom - Feed Mill

Center
- Saw Mill, Platform above

East end (right)
- 1st - Open
- 2nd - Storage & Packing

The saw mill operation was described in its first year of operation:

This is one of the new enterprises of the place, having been run about six or eight months. They have a large frame building roofed with slate, and within that presents a scene of busy activity. The men busily employed, the rapid motion of the machinery, with its accompaniment, the musical hum. We were shown through the establishment by Mr. Fetter, who has especial charge of this establishment, Mr. Finney devoting his attention to the large spoke works at Lambertville.

They have one large Mulay saw, used for cutting the logs into plank, the plank are then cut into proper lengths and sawed into felloes, for which purpose they have two machines, which are kept busy filling orders. They also have a large band saw used for selling shafts, and other work, where short crooks are needed. Numerous small circular saws add their aid to lessen and expedite labor.

In the basement they have planing machines and other machinery necessary for their business. The engine is located in the basement, and is of sufficient size to furnish all the power required. They have their businesses arranged to work up all the material, but very little refuse lumber being seen lying around.

They saw the logs into plank, and what they do not ship in this way, are cut into felloes, and what is left from these is sawed into hatchet handle bolts, and what is then left is used down in the engine room to feed the furnace. They make enough wood for their own use and sell considerable firewood.

Mr. Fetter informed us that they had all the work they could do since they started. Thirteen men are employed in and about the establishment and have but little idle time.

- Lambertville Record, 4/7/1875

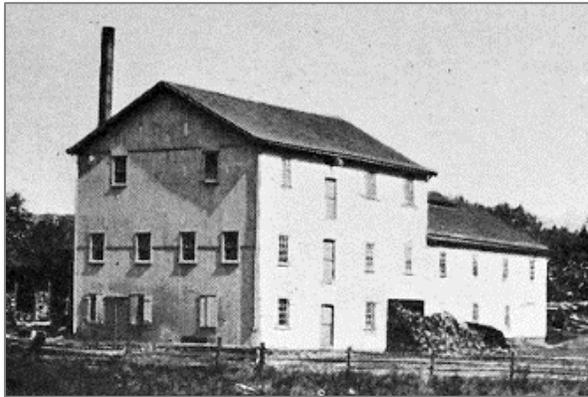
Second Mill Building (1895)

The second mill building was constructed after the 1895 fire, continued operating as a mill until around 1930, and then was demolished in 1945.



1930 - Second Mill building - Looking NE from Louellen to Model
[Hopewell Aerial 1930]

The east side of the building was two stores, with a ramp to the second floor on the end to feed logs for sawing. The west end was three stories, with the second floor for the feed mill and grain storage above. The bottom floors were for associated storage. The Model Avenue side also had a utility room and brick chimney.

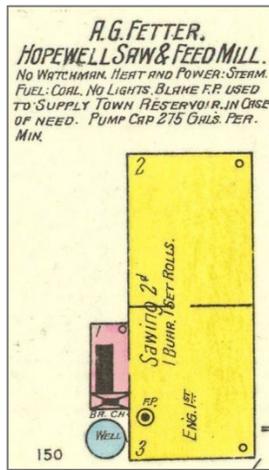


c1897 - Second Mill - Looking NE from Louellen
(Facing 3-story end on west)
[Hopewell 1909; Also in HHH 1897]



Second Mill - Looking SW from Model
(Facing 2-story end on east)
Ramp in end to feed logs for sawing (2nd)
Utility room and chimney behind
Sign: "A. G. Fetter / Hopewell Mill"
[Elaine Zeltner, n/d]

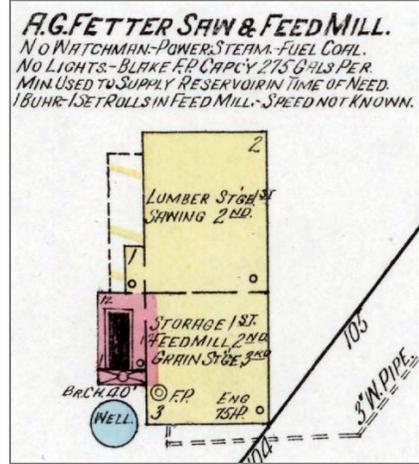
In 1912 and 1918, for possible estate sale, the mill was described as a large three-story frame building, 50 x 100 feet, with a 60 hp engine. In 1919 for the public sale, the mill was listed as having a 100 hp boiler, 90 hp engine, and roller mills for grinding grain. [HH 2/12/1919]



[Sanborn 1902]

- Sanborn 1902 -**
- 2nd - Sawing
 - 1st West (bot.) - Eng.

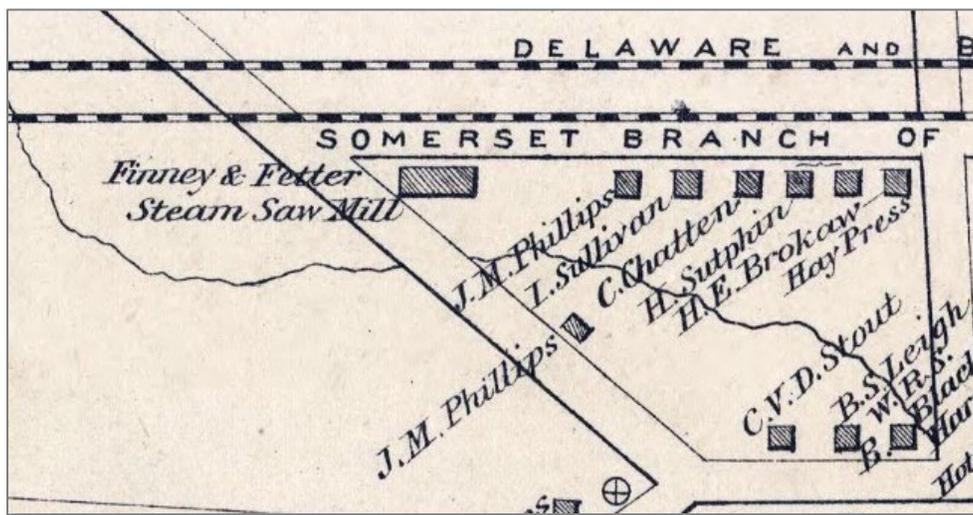
- Sanborn 1912 -**
- West end (bottom) - 3 stories
 - 1st - Storage
 - 2nd - Feed Mill
 - 3rd - Grain Storage
 - East End (top) - 2 stories
 - 1st - Lumber Storage
 - 2nd - Sawing
 - 75 hp Engine
 - Well - 275 Gals/min reserve capacity



[Sanborn 1912]

Property Maps

Early Maps - First Mill (1875, 1887)



1875 - "Finney & Fetter Steam Saw Mill"

On triangle at Louellen Ave. Model Ave. (Mercer & Somerset railroad tracks)

[Mercer Atlas 1875]



1887 - "Finney & Fetter Steam Mill"

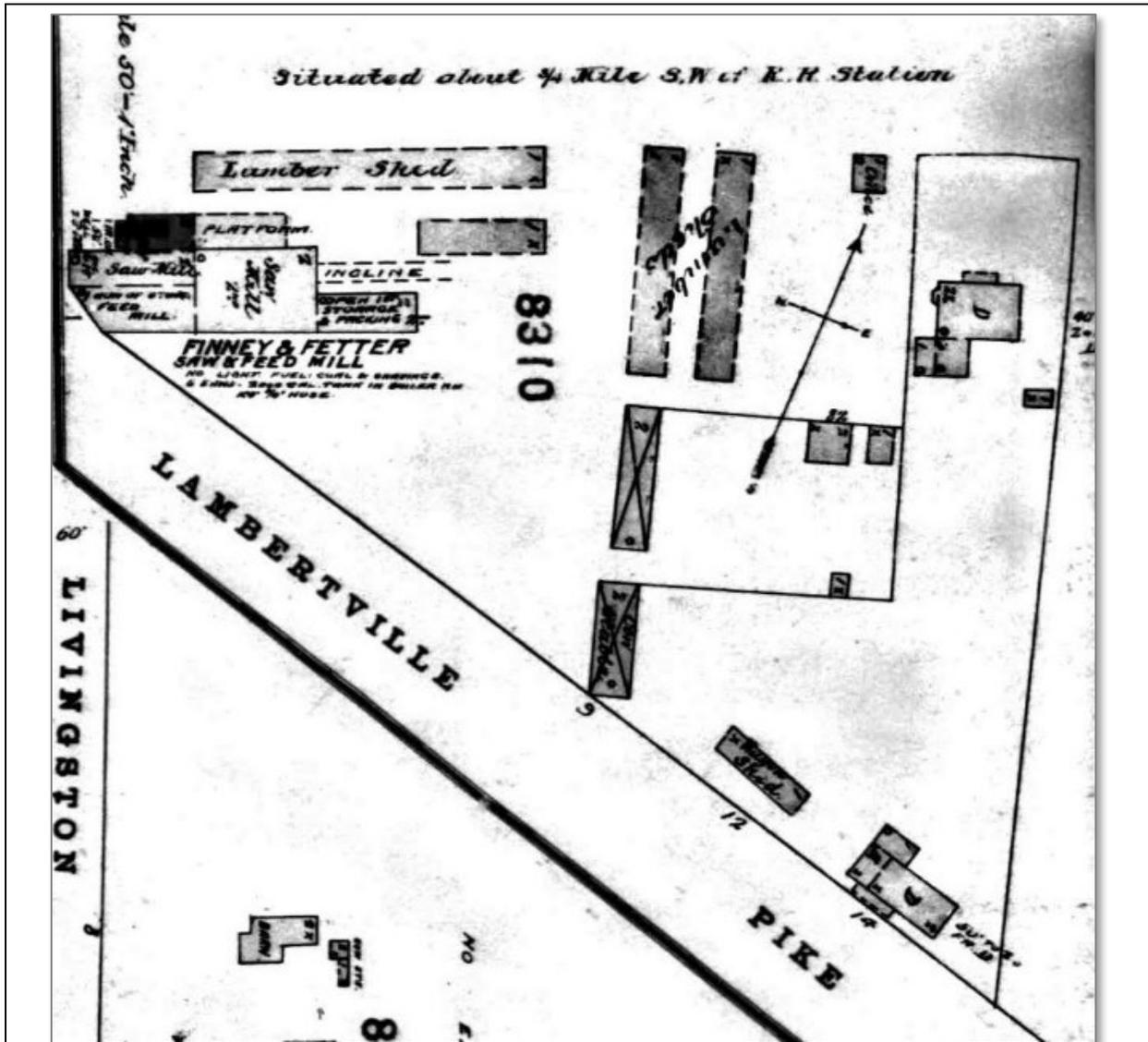
On Railroad Ave. (now Model)

and Lambertville Pike (now Louellen Ave.)

Smokestack on west side, sheds east and south

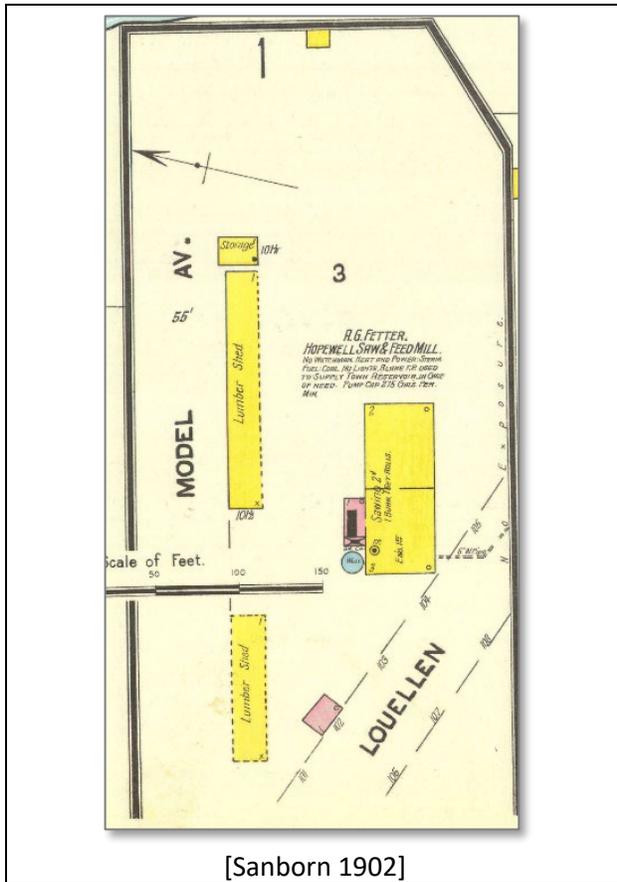
[Fowler 1887]

Early Fire Maps - First Mill (1890)



1890 - "Finney & Fetter Saw & Feed Mill" (before 1895 fire)
Similar to Fowler - Mill buildings and shed [Scarlett 1890]

Fire Maps - Second Mill (1902-1935)

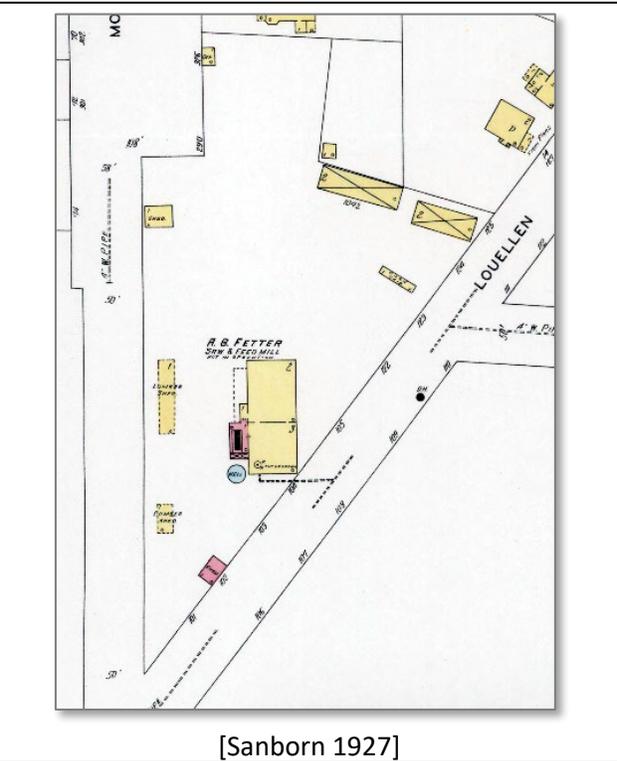
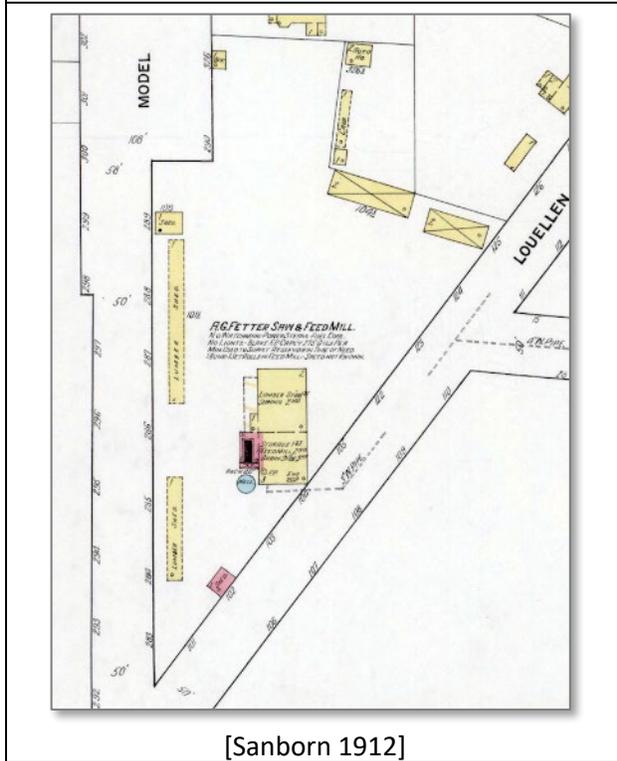


1902 - "A. G. Fetter Hopewell Saw & Feed Mill"
 (rebuilt after 1895 fire)
 - Mill, 2 Lumber Sheds
 - Well (blue circle) feeding pipe down Louellen

1912 - "A. G. Fetter Saw & Feed Mill"
 - Shows additional sheds down Louellen

1927 - "A. G. Fetter Saw & Feed Mill"
 "Not In Operation"
 - Sheds by Model reduced
 - Pipe from well "Out of Order"

1935 Update (not shown)
 - Mill marked "Fire / Ruins"
 - Smaller lumber shed gone (bottom left)



References

Information extracted and summarized from sources including books, reports, maps, deeds, newspapers, and photos. Many of the original materials (i.e., documents, maps, aerials, and photos) come from the many contributors to the Hopewell Valley History Project and are shared on the site - see the Acknowledgements page (HopewellHistoryProject.org).

Comments, additions, and corrections are welcome.

Thanks to the contributors who kindly provided information and materials, including:

[RP] - Richard Porter for information on the early history of these properties.

Elaine Zeltner for information on Fetter and the mill photo.

See the HVHS Newsletter article for more on A. G. Fetter and family [HVHS 2008]

Books / References

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