

## **The Bridgeport Covered Bridge Structural Construction is Completed Roof Shakes remain as the only unfinished item**

With the structural work on the bridge now completed, a century-old tradition referred to as “Topping Out” with a “Wetting Bush” is to celebrate completion of the timber structure by attaching a softwood bough to the rafter top and baptize the same with rum.

One of the more well-known timber traditions involves nailing a bough or small evergreen tree to the highest point of the timber frame.

The ritual serves two purposes: *One pays homage to all the trees that went into the construction of the house, and to the many hands that built it. The other symbolizes the establishment of the house’s roots, which will nourish a long and prosperous life. The young tree is called a “whetting bush”, likely derived from the German tradition of watering it as a sign of the home’s first nourishment.*

Ask ten timber framers about "topping off" the frame and you’ll get ten slightly different answers. But the common thread is: *The whetting (wetting) bush is placed as a symbol of thanksgiving. Some say it gives thanks to the forest for providing timber for a new home. Some say it gives thanks for a safe raising. A few simply say it’s “good luck.”*

Once the last timber is raised and pegged, the moment is documented with a photograph. Why? Perhaps because timber framers often feel that the timber frame will never be more beautiful than at that moment (before it is covered by walls and a roof), perhaps because all present sense that this structure will outlast everyone in the picture.

Article composited from Bridgewright [Tim Andrews, JLC](#) and [Timber frame HQ](#)

Photos\_ John Field