

# Brown's Ferry Blues

*People cross the river on the ferry boat ride*

*Bring their stories from far and wide*

*Lawd, Lawd, I got those Brown's Ferry Blues*

*Tell tall tales and sad ones too*

*Some are lies and some are true,*

*Lawd, Lawd, I got those Brown's Ferry Blues*

*-traditional bluegrass song*

BY LOYCE MARTINAZZI

I was down at the State Archives in Salem twenty years ago, nosing around for information about early Tualatin for our book, *Tualatin... From the Beginning*, when I came across files on the Territorial and Provincial governments that preceded Oregon statehood. I was surprised to find a file titled Oregon Territory vs. Zenas J. Brown.

I already knew that Zenas Brown had operated a ferry across the Tualatin River—one that connected the territorial road with Child's Road which led to what is now Stafford Road. Oh boy, I thought, this might be interesting. I called for the file and I was astounded by what I read.

Seems that Zenas Brown, a single man, came to the Oregon Country around the horn in 1850 and took up a Territorial Land Claim of almost 640 acres, located on the east side

of the Meridian Line. Zenas was lucky to get in under the wire: After the Donation Land Claim act of 1851, settlers could obtain only half that amount). Brown established his ferry, but also set up a medical practice in Oregon City, where he claimed to be an "eclectic physician and surgeon". He married Ester Mosier, sister of Edward Byrom's wife, Elizabeth.

Isaac Warwick, a young man who had worked at Moore's Mill, purchased land from Brown, but could not pay. In 1855 Warwick became very ill and the good Dr. Brown took him in and treated him, but the neighbors were concerned with the kind of treatment being dosed out. Warwick told other settlers that Brown would not let him leave. According to witnesses, Warwick was filthy, malnourished and had a bad case of lice, as well as a boil and the "the liver complaint." Warwick died, and among his few possessions was a violin. I wonder if he ever played the Brown's Ferry Blues. Brown applied to the court to administer Warwick's will, but was denied. A year later Brown was indicted for murder.

Although the Territorial Circuit Court acquitted Brown for lack of evidence, he felt the community's suspicion and quickly sold his land and headed out of Dodge. Actually, he purchased land a few miles

north, before moving to Salem and then to Florida. His ferry fell out of favor after Sam Galbreath installed his ferry on Boones Ferry Road up river. The whereabouts of Brown's cabin and the grave site of Isaac Warwick are unknown.

Most of the Brown land claim was on the north side of the Tualatin River, which now includes the Rosewood and Rivergrove districts. But the south side was a pretty



Zenas Brown's ferry may have looked like this. Men are using poles to push the ferry across the river. ©Oregon Historical Society # bb007609



Photo courtesy of Paul Hennon, City of Tualatin

Brown's Ferry Park showing the dock

little meadow between Nyberg Lane and the Tualatin River. Through the years, the scandal was forgotten and several families farmed the land, including Hoffmans, Shermans, Lacey and Helgessons. I picked beans for Shermans as a kid in the late 1940s and raked hay for the Lacey family.

So despite the cloud of suspicion that had darkened Brown's reputation so many years ago, in 1997 the City of Tualatin developed a 28 acre nature park on the south part of his claim, and named it Brown's Ferry Park.



Photo courtesy of Paul Hennon, City of Tualatin

**HO! YE THAT THIRST  
COME AND BUY  
DR. BROWN. MD**  
*Eclectic Physician and Surgeon  
Office fronting the levee, a few doors  
below the ferry  
Oregon City O. T.*  
Also a manufacturer of lemon syrup,  
Storonton Bitters,  
Sweet Cider, Cordials, &c. &c.,  
together with that most excellent and  
healthy beverage SARPARIILA BEER.  
With a variety of medicines, trinkets, &c.,  
too numerous to mention.  
All which will be sold low for cash.  
Come and see.  
N.B. Consultations upon delicate diseases  
of male and female  
in perfect confidence  
Advice to the poor gratuitous

Zenas Brown's ad in the Oregon City Spectator in 1850. Medicine was not a regulated profession at that time and anyone could claim to be a doctor