

# JOHN HARDY [LAWS I2]

Traditional Old-Time Breakdown and Song; **DATE:** 1916 by Cecil Sharp. **CATEGORY:** Fiddle and Instrumental Tunes. **RECORDING INFO:** Carter Family-1928, Dock Boggs; Buell Kazee; Kingston Trio; Tony Rice; Country Gentlemen; **OTHER NAMES:** "John Hardy Was a Desperate Little Man." **NOTES:** John Hardy is popular not only as a song but also as an instrumental solo (banjo, fiddle, or guitar). John Hardy was a black man working in the tunnels of West Virginia. In fact, as Alan Lomax remarks, "the two songs ("John Henry" & "John Hardy") have sometimes been combined by folk singers, and the two characters confused by ballad collectors...." One payday, in a crap game at Shawnee Coal Company's camp (in what is today Eckman, WV), John Hardy killed a fellow worker. His white captors protected him from a lynch mob that came to take him out of jail and hang him. When the lynch fever subsided, Hardy was tried during the July term of the McDowell County Criminal Court, found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. While awaiting execution in jail, he is said to have composed this ballad, which he later sang on the scaffold. He also confessed his sins to a minister, became very religious, and advised all young men, as he stood beneath the gallows, to shun liquor, gambling and bad company. The order for his execution shows that he was hanged near the courthouse in McDowell County, January 19, 1894.

John Har - dy was a des - perate lit - tle  
 man he car - ried two guns ev - ery day  
 He shot a man on the West Vir - gin - ia  
 line you should have seen John Har - dy get - ting a - way poor  
 boy you should have seen John Har - dy get - ting a - way.

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 He went on across to the East Stone bridge, There he thought he'd be free  
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Up steps the sheriff and he takes him by the arm

**D** **G**  
 Saying, "Johnny, come along with me, poor boy, Johnny, come along with me."

He sent for his Mama and his Papa, too, To come and go his bail  
 But there weren't no bail on a murder charge  
 So they threw John Hardy back in jail, poor boy, Threw John Hardy back in jail.

John Hardy had a pretty little girl, The dress that she wore was blue  
 She came into the jailhouse hall  
 Saying, "Johnny, I'll be true to you, poor boy, Johnny, I'll be true to you."

I've been to the East and I've been to the West, Traveled this wide world around  
 Been to the river and I've been baptized  
 And now I'm on my hanging ground, Now I'm on my hanging ground.