

JOHN HENRY [LAWS I1]

Traditional Old-Time Breakdown and ballad; **DATE:** Ca. 1900; **CATEGORY:** Early Country and Bluegrass; **RECORDING INFO:** Kenny Baker and Josh Graves; Big Bill Broonzy; Tommy Jarrell; Lilly Brothers; Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers; Ralph Stanley; Flatt and Scruggs; **OTHER NAMES:** John Henry Blues; Death of John Henry; Steel Drivin' Man; **NOTES:** One of the earliest known versions of "John Henry" was printed as what is now known as the "Blankenship Broadside," "John Henry, the Steel Driving Man." There is no indication of date or place. Guy Johnson dated it based on information provided by the source of his copy of the broadside, a woman living in Rome, Georgia, as "ca 1900." One of the most popular of all American folksongs, the raging debate that started in the 1920's about the identity of the real John Henry goes on.

John Hen-ry was a lit-tle ba-by boy you could hold him in the palm of your
hand His pa-pa cried out this lone-some fare - well say-ing John-ny gon-na be a
steel driv-ing man Lord Lord John-ny gon-na be a steel driv-ing man.

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G John Henry went upon the mountain, his hammer was striking fire **D**
G

But the mountain was too tall, John Henry was too small

So he laid down his hammer and he died. **C** Lord, **G** Lord, **D** laid down his hammer and he died. **G**

John Henry went into the tunnel, had his captain by his side
The last words that John Henry said,
"Bring a cool drink of water before I die. Lord, Lord, cool drink of water before I die."

Talk about John Henry as much as you please, say and do all that you can
There never was born in the United States
Never such a steel driving man, Lord, Lord, never such a steel driving man.

John Henry had a little woman and her name was Polly Ann
John Henry took sick and he had to go to bed
Polly drove steel like a man, Lord, Lord, Polly drove steel like a man.

John Henry told his captain, I want to go to bed
Lord, fix me a pallet, I want to lay down
Got a mighty roaring in my head, Lord, Lord, mighty roaring in my head.

Took John Henry to the graveyard and they buried him under the sand
Now every locomotive comes a roaring by
Says, "Yonder lies a steel driving man, Lord, Lord, yonder lies a steel driving man."