

John Henry

USA

earliest date: 1909 (Ballad Index)

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1. When John Hen - ry was a lit - tle ba - by, a — -
sit - tin' on his pa - pa's knee, he — -
picked up a ham - mer and a lit - tle piece of steal, and he said,
"Ham - mer's gon - na be the death of me, Lord, Lord", and he said,
"Ham - mer's gon - na be the death of me."

2. Well, the captain said to John Henry,
"I'm gonna bring that steam drill 'round,
gonna bring that steam drill out on the job,
gonna whop the steel on down, Lord, Lord,
gonna whop the steel on down."
3. John Henry said to the captain,
"Lord, a man ain't nothing but a man,
and before I'd let your steam drill beat me down,
I'd die with my hammer in my hand, Lord, Lord,
I'd die with my hammer in my hand."
4. The sun was shining hot and was burning,
there was no breeze at all.
Sweat ran down like water down a hill,
the day John Henry let his hammer fall, Lord, Lord,
the day John Henry let his hammer fall.
5. Now the man that invented the steam drill,
he thought he was mighty fine.
But John Henry, he drove fifteen feet by his hands,
the steam drill only made nine, Lord, Lord,
the steam drill only made nine.
6. John Henry hammed in the mountain,
and his hammer was strikin' fire.
But he hammered so hard that it broke his poor heart,
and he laid down his hammer and he died, Lord, Lord,
and he laid down his hammer and he died.
7. They took John Henry to the graveyard,
and they buried him in the sand.
And every locomotive come a-roarin' by,
says, "There lies a steel drivin' man, Lord, Lord,
says, "There lies a steel drivin' man."