

# Johnny Cash

## "Legend Of John Henry's Hammer"

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John Henry's pappy woke him up one midnight  
He said, "'Fore the sheriff comes I wanna tell you,  
listen boy"  
Said, "Learn to ball a jack, learn to lay a track  
Learn to pick and shovel too and take my hammer  
It'll do anything you tell it to"

John Henry's mammy had about a dozen babies  
John Henry's pappy broke jail about a dozen times  
The babies all got sick and when the doctor wanted  
money  
He said, "I'll pay you a quarter at a time startin'  
tomorrow  
That's the pay for a steel driver on this line"

Then the section foreman said, "Hey, hammer swinger  
I see you brought your own hammer boy  
But what else can all those muscles do  
And he said, "I can turn a jack, I can lay a track  
I can pick and shovel too"

Can you swing a hammer boy?  
Yes sir, I'll do anything, you hire me to

Now ain't you somethin'  
So high and mighty wif your muscles  
Just go ahead, boy and pick up that hammer  
Pick up the hammer

He said, "Get a rusty spike and swing it down three  
times  
I'll pay you a nickel a day for every inch you sink it to  
Go on and do what you say you can do"

With a steep nose hammer on a four foot switch handle  
John Henry raised it back 'til it touched his heels then  
The spike went through the cross tie and it split it half  
in two  
Thirty-five cents a day for drivin' steel

Sweat, sweat boy, sweat, you owe me two more swings  
I was born for driven steel

Well John Henry hammered in the mountain  
He'd give a grunt, he'd give a groan with every swing  
The women folks for miles around heard him and come  
down  
To watch him make the cold steel ring, Lord what a  
swinger  
Just listen to that cold steel ring

But the bad boss come up laughin' at John Henry  
Said, "You full of vinegar now, but you about through  
We gonna get a steam drill to do your share of drivin'  
Then what's all them muscles gonna do? Huh, John  
Henry?  
Gonna take a little bit of vinegar out of you"

John Henry said, "I feed four little brothers  
And baby sister's walkin' on her knees  
Did the Lord say that machines oughtta take the place  
of livin'?  
And what's a substitute for bread and beans? I ain't  
seen it  
Do engines get rewarded for their steam?"

John Henry hid in a coal mine for his dinner nap  
Had thirty minutes to rest before the bell  
The mine boss hollered, "Get up, whoever you are, and  
get a pick axe  
Give me enough coal to start another hell and keep it  
burnin'  
Mine me enough to start another hell"

John Henry said to his captain, "A man ain't nothin' but  
a man  
But if you'll bring that steam drill round, I'll beat it fair  
and honest  
I'll die with my hammer in my hand but I'll be laughin'  
'Cuz you can't replace a steel drivin' man"

There was a big crowd of people at the mountain  
John Henry said to the steam drill, "How is you?  
Pardon me mister steam drill, I suppose you didn't hear  
me"  
I said, "How're you?"

Well can you turn a jack, can you lay a track  
Can you pick and shovel too?  
Listen, this hammer swinger's talkin' to you

Two thousand people hollered, "Go, John Henry"  
Then somebody hollered, "The mountain's caving in"

John Henry told the captain, "Tell the kind folks don't  
worry  
That ain't nothin' but my hammer suckin' wind, it keeps  
me breathin'  
A steel driver's muscle I intend"

Captain, tell the people, move back further  
I'm at the finish line and there ain't no drill  
It's so far behind but yet ain't got the brains to quit it  
When she blows up she'll scatter 'cross the hills, Lord  
lordy  
When she blows up she'll scatter 'cross the hills

Well John Henry had a little woman  
I believe the lady's name was Polly Ann  
Yeah that was his good woman  
John Henry threw his hammer over his shoulder and  
went on home

He laid down to rest his weary back and early next  
mornin'  
He said, "Come here Polly Ann, come here sugar  
Ya know, I believe this is the first time I ever watched  
The sun come up that I couldn't come up"

"Take my hammer, Polly Ann and go to that railroad  
Swing that hammer like you seen me do it  
And when you're swingin' with the lead man  
They'll all know, they'll all know you're John Henry's  
woman  
But, but tell them ain't all you can do"

"Tell 'em I can hoist a jack, and I can lay a track  
I can pick and shovel too, ain't no machine can  
That's been proved to you"

There was a big crowd of mourners at the church  
house  
The section hands laid him in the sand  
Trains go by on the rails John Henry laid  
They slow down and take off their hats, the men do

When they come to the place where John Henry's layin'  
Restin' his back, some of 'em say, "Mornin', steel driver  
You sure was a hammer swinger"  
Then they go on by, pickin' up a little speed  
Clickity clack, clickity clack, clickity clack, clickity clack

Yonder lies a steel drivin' man, oh, Lord  
Yonder lies a steel drivin' man  
Yonder lies a steel drivin' man, oh, Lord

Yonder lies a steel drivin' man

Yonder lies a steel drivin' man, oh, Lord

Yonder lies a steel drivin' man

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