

1. They made him a slave down in Alabam -
Alabama, John Cherokee!
 He run away every time he can,
Alabama, John Cherokee!

Way ay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!
Way ay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!

2. Shipped him aboard a whaling ship,
Alabama, John Cherokee!
 Again and again he gave them the slip.
Alabama, John Cherokee!

3. They catch'd him again and they chain'd
 him tight,
Alabama, John Cherokee!
 Kept him in the dark, without any light.
Alabama, John Cherokee!

4. Now his ghost is often seen
Alabama, John Cherokee!
 Sitting on the main truck, slimy and green
Alabama, John Cherokee!

5. Break of dawn he goes below
Alabama, John Cherokee!
 That's when the cocks begin to crow.
Alabama, John Cherokee!

Way ay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!
Way ay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!



The American Cyclopædia: *Drawing of a Cherokee man standing*, 1879
 (via Wikimedia)

Notes:

A halyard shanty

Other names: Alabama, Alabama John Cherokee, John Cherokee,

This version: [Portsmouth Shantymen](#) CD: *Heaving at the Bars*.

Hugill, Stan, 1994, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*:

This is a typical work song dating back to the days of Negro slavery either in the West Indies or the Southern States. Harding said it was in fairly common use among coloured crowds in the old West Indian Traders. He said it was a **hauling song**, and it certainly has a good rhythm in the refrains for two short drags, but Captain Robinson, who gives a slightly different version, (in *The Bellman*, Minneapolis, 1917) states that it was used at the **capstan**.

It probably was introduced to seamen by way of the cotton hoosiers of Mobile.

The "indian" is quite possibly a man from the West Indies.

Compare this more obviously land-based version from **Colcord, Joanna, 1964, *Songs of American Sailormen*,**

John Cherokee was an Indian man,
 He run away every time he can,

They put him aboard a Yankee ship,
 Again he gave the boss the slip.

They catch him again and chain him tight,
 And starve him many days and nights.

He have nothing to drink and nothing to eat,
 So he just gone dead at the boss's feet.

So they bury him by the old gate post,
 And the day he died, you can see his ghost.

Notes on the words

Main truck - a circular disc (or rectangle) of wood near or at the top of the main mast, usually with holes or sheaves to reeve signal halyards; also a temporary or emergency place for a lookout.

Goes below - disappears (below decks)