

Johnny Come down the Hilo

1. Well I never seen the like since I bin born,
A railroad navvy with his sea boots on.

**When Johnny come down the Hilo,
poor old man
I'll wake 'er, I'll shake 'er,
I'll wake that gal with the blue dress on!
When Johnny come down the Hilo,
poor old man**

2. I met a little gal across the sea,
She's a 'Badian beauty and she says to me

**When Johnny come down the Hilo,
poor old man
I'll wake 'er, I'll shake 'er,
I'll wake that gal with the blue dress on!
When Johnny come down the Hilo,
poor old man**

3. Who's been here since I been gone?
Pretty little gal with a jousey on.

4. Well my wife died in Tennessee,
And they sent her jawbone back to me.

[So I hung that jawbone on a fence
And I ain't heard nothin' but the jawbone since.
]

5. Hand me down my riding cane
I'm off to see my darling Jane.

6. Well I never seen the like since I been born
A railroad navvy with his sea boots on.

**When Johnny come down the Hilo,
poor old man
I'll wake 'er, I'll shake 'er,
I'll wake that gal with the blue dress on!
When Johnny come down the Hilo,
poor old man.**

This version, apart from the verse in brackets [...] by
The Longest Johns: at youtu.be/3OpoJzeOFLQ -
oops! became available!

Try **Ken Schatz** & Richmond Tabernacle Choir
version at <https://youtu.be/Y3OaTC43BHs>

Notes

A **capstan** shanty

Alternative names: Johnny come down the Hilo,
Johnny come down to Hilo, Johnny walk along to Hilo,
Johnny come down the backstay, Poor old man

About the words

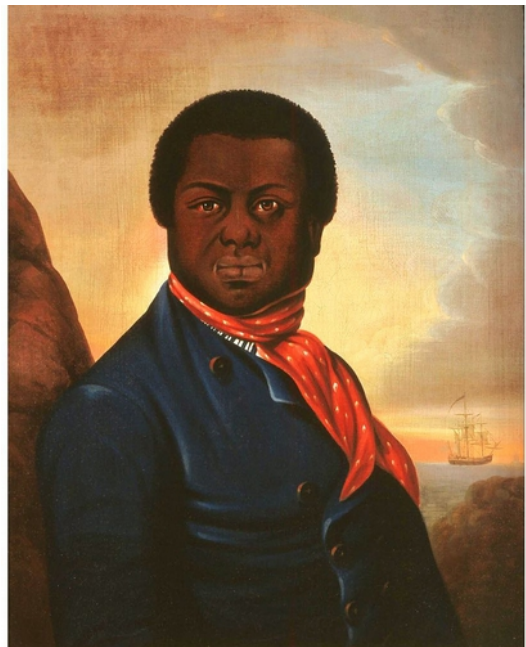
Railroad navvy - can also be sung as big buck navvy,
big black sailor, big buck nigger or railroad nigger.

Navvy - or navigator, was first used for a worker who
created the navigation canals in the 18th century, then
used for those who built the railways. Find out more
about them at the [Railway Museum](#).

Hilo - Hilo is on the island of Hawaii, but some
suggest that this song is referring to the island of Ilo
or the port of Ilo in Peru.

Josey - I've no idea but it also occurs in the [Refrain of
the Red River Plantation](#).

Who's been here? was originally answered with "Big
buck nigger with his seaboots on", like in [The Hogs-
eye Man](#).



Portrait of a Black Sailor (Paul Cuffe?)
Painting by an unknown author, c 1880,
in the [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#),
via [wikimedia](#)

[Jim Mageean](#), 2021, *Heave Away*, booklet and CD
wrote:

This shanty has taken words from other shanties such
as "Poor Old Man" (also known as [Dead Horse
Shanty](#)) and "The girl with the blue dress" and put
them to an Irish tune.

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

The Chilling solution revision tune is Irish in origin and
the wording is a mixture of Negro catch-phrases, of
lines from Negro and nigger minstrel ditties, and odd
bits from other shanties.