

### ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY JANUARY 19



**African- American railroad worker John Hardy was hanged at Welch, McDowell County, on January 19, 1894. Hardy later became the subject of a popular folk song.**

**CSO: SS.8.23, ELA.8.18**

**Investigate the Document: (Vertical Clipping Files, Lynching & Hangings and Capital Punishment, Beckley Post Herald, John Hardy)**

1. What was John Hardy's motive to commit murder? How much money was in dispute?
2. How did John Hardy choose to murder his victim?
3. What did Hardy see as he looked out from his prison cell?
4. What did Hardy confess about the night he committed murder?
5. What are the characteristics of the first ballad? Does it tell a story? What type of stanzas are found in the second ballad?

**Think Critically:** Describe the evolution of capital punishment. Is it a deterrent to heinous crimes? Does the State of West Virginia still carry out executions? What do you think life was like in a southern West Virginia coal camp during the 1890s?

Yesterday And Today—

#212

HANGINGS

## Gives Versions Of Balladry On John Hardy

By SHIRLEY DONNELLY

One of the cash customers of this column is the Rev. James H. Davis, rector of the Ascension Episcopal Church of over Hinton way. He is filled with wonderment about the late John Hardy of steel driving distinction and wants to know more and more about this legendary character.



It is to be deplored that we don't have more documented low-down on the famous descendant of Ham, but we don't and that is that. However, we have various versions of the ballad about the

big brawny boy and today we're printing one for you to clip and paste in your scrap book of local lore. Here it is:

John Hardy was a bad, bad man,  
And he came from a bad, bad land

He killed two men in Shawnee Camp

'Cause he's too d-n nervy for to run, G-- d-n!

Too d- nervy for to run.

John Hardy went to the rock quarry,

He went there for to drive, Lord!  
Lord!

The rock was so hard and the steel was so soft,

That he laid down his hammer and he cried, "O, my God!"

He laid down his hammer and he cried.

John Hardy was standing on my right hand side,

The steel hammers on my left,  
Lord! Lord!

"Before I'd let the steamer beat me down,

I'd die with my hammer in my hand, by G--!

I'd die with my hammer in my hand."

John Hardy was standing at the dice-room door,

So drunk he could not see, Lordy!  
Lord!

Long came his woman, five dollars in her hand,

Said, "You count John Hardy in

the game, G-- d-n!

You count John Hardy in the game!"

John Hardy went to playing in the game of cards,

The pot was broken, says he stays Lordy, Lord!

He drew the nine of diamonds to a diamond bob,

And he says, "I'll let the whole d-n bill play, by G--!"

He says, "I'll let the whole d-n bill play."

John Hardy went staggering by the jail-house,

As drunk as he could be, Lordy!  
Lord!

Up stepped a policeman, caught him by the arm,

Says, "John Hardy, come and go with me, poor boy!

John Hardy, come and go with me."

Friends and relatives standing around,

Crying, "John Hardy, what have you done? Poor boy!"

"I've murdered two men in a Shawnee Camp,

Was too d-n nervy for to run, G-- d-n!

Now I'm standing on my hanging ground."

### MORE ABOUT JOHN HARDY,

the John Hardy who was hanged for murder down in McDowell County. While John Hardy was multiplied in the various ballads until you can't tell which is which,

the one I'm talking about right now was the one who killed another Negro in a crap game in a coal camp that was owned by the Shawnee Coal Company.

He killed the man in a quarrel over a quarter. According to my data, John Hardy hid out until some one squealed on him and the sheriff picked him up. Hardy was tried, convicted and hanged. As preparation for his execution John Hardy was baptized in the Tug River by Rev. Lex Evans, a white mountaineer who was a Baptist preacher.

The unbecoming profanity in the foregoing version of the ballad, the figure of John Hardy as a whiskey drinking, gambling, mur-

derin' man, is a set-up that easily fitted into the picture of a rowdy coal or railroad camp in West Virginia 50 or 60 years ago. Attorney H. H. Christian of "the Free State of McDowell" defended John Hardy but failed to save his client's neck. This John Hardy is reputed to have been black as a raven's wing; big, raw-boned, and had very long arms. His weight was about 200 and his age was in the neighborhood of 40 years. He was from Virginia.

### CHANCES ARE THAT

the Big Bend Tunnel was a later interpolation or invention of ballad composers. Another version has the steel driving man dropping dead after beating the steam hammer in the steel driving contest. Here are three of its stanzas:

They took his hammer and wrapped it in gold

And gave it to Julia Ann;

And the last word John Hardy said to her

Was, "Julia, do the best you can;

If I die a rail road man,  
Go bury me under the tie,  
So I can hear old Number Four,  
As she goes rolling by.

If I die a rail road man,  
Go bury me under the sand,  
With a pick and a shovel at my head and feet,  
And a nine-pound hammer in my hand."

ANOTHER VERSION of the ballad closes with this:

"I've been to the East and I've been to the West,  
I've been the wide world round,  
I've been to the river and I've been baptized,  
And now I'm on my hanging ground."

STILL ANOTHER ballad runs as follows as it closes:

They took him to the scaffold,  
They took him there to die;  
The last word John Hardy said,  
poor boy, was:  
"My forty-four gun never lies,  
My forty-four gun never lies."