

LUCY WAN Lyrics

Chris Sherburn & Denny Bartley NOE03

New Railroad

Chorus

Working on the new railroad with mud up to my knees
Working on the new railroad with mud up to my knees
Digging for big John Henry he's so hard to please
I've been around the world.

I came out with the new railroad to work for John Henry,
We've laid track through every town, watched new towns come to be.
The money that we're making, we're spending kind of free
And I've been around the world.

Chorus

There's a girl that I love, she sits deep in my mind,
At the end of each hard working day, I see her dressed so fine.
When I get away from here, I'm going to ask her to be mine,
And I've been around the world.

You came out here a single girl, you wear a dress so fine.
Single girl, single girl, where did you get to be so fine.
I got my dress from a railroad man, my shoes from a driver on the line,
And I've been around the world.

Chorus

I know things will be different and life will be so fine
When I get through these new towns out on John Henry's line.
This railroad's moving so fast its eating up my time,
I've been around the world.

The new railroad is ready now with cars out on the track,
New railroad is ready there are cars out on the track.
Now I've made my money, I'm never coming back,
I've been around the world.

Chorus

Thirty years have rolled away, like the cars going up the line,
I'm left in this dusty town, with nothing much that's mine.
The beer and girls I pay for are the only friends I find,
And I've been around the world.

Chorus

I first heard a version of New Railroad from Harry Gurevitch in Hull in 1989. Harry was a country blues musician and, having spent many hours in his company, his thinking has definitely influenced this version. I dedicate it to his memory.

This version has been given a new direction by us. We've written four new verses and amalgamated some lines from original versions with new lines to make the song a tale of emigration. The famines of the 1830/40's saw a great many Irish forced to work the railroads of the USA. Because the original version has a very bluegrass feel to it, the song didn't work for us. The chorus has haunted us since Hull days in the early 1990's though, so we had to do something with it. As Wayne Erbsen says in his book 'Railroad Fever', "Like a rolling boxcar,

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New Railroad doesn't stay put but is always on the go, being passed from one singer to another, changing as it goes." It's definitely done that.

John Henry was an important symbol of the working class, depicted as a black man wielding a sledge hammer and represented marginalisation in changing times of the 19th century.

For original versions check out Sara Grey or the band, Crooked Still. Crooked Still have a great version on Youtube.