

The Longest Homerun on Record - Summer 1941

I remember the summer well. It was the last summer of baseball for many of the players of the Avon Town Team in the Farmington Valley League. Soon the United States would go to war after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

This was the last season for my oldest brother Hank, a diminutive shortstop with a good arm, and, despite his size, a hefty slugger at the plate. The following summer he would be in the U.S. Army.

The Avon "Townies," as they were called, played their home games at Sperry Park, a baseball field unique in many ways.

The land was donated to the town of Avon by Frank Sperry who loved the game of baseball. The playing field was well kept and the infield grass mowed and groomed by the players themselves. The outfield grass didn't need much cutting at all because a neighbor down the road tethered two cows in the outer pastures every day and the cows chewed the grass evenly.

It was about 350 feet down the left field foul line to the railroad tracks. In center field, about 400 feet straight away, was a huge oak tree. Right field was simply open field where spectators parked their cars around the periphery of the playing surface.

Every Sunday afternoon the four o'clock train from the New Haven-Northampton Line would interrupt the game as it chugged slowly through town. The umpires had to be alert to stop the game in progress while the train passed by.

One bright, sunny afternoon when the "Townies" were playing their arch-rivals, the Collinsville "Axes," the umpires must have been deaf. Every spectator and all the players heard the whistle as the train approached Avon center. The umpires failed to halt the game as the train went by travelling slowly to the south.

The game was in the ninth inning with Avon trailing by a score of 3-1, with two outs and two men on base. My brother Hank was at the plate. Rube Horn, the crafty Collinsville pitcher, threw the ball. Whack, was the sound of the bat hitting the baseball, as Hank blasted the pitch down the left field alley. The long fly ball reached the railroad tracks and landed on the coal car, right behind the engine, as the train passed by.

The engineer tooted his whistle with two short blasts for the spectators as he did every Sunday, and then continued on his way.

As Hank rounded the bases in his home run trot, the white baseball could be seen on the black coal car as the train pulled out of town headed for New Haven.

The Avon "Townies" won the game that Sunday, 4-3, on the longest home run on record: 375 feet plus 38 miles to New Haven on the train!