

ROGER CONNOR

"I used to nail the horsehide over the fence into the tall grass and that would tickle some of the old New York stock brokers."

— Roger Connor

Roger Connor, who held the lifetime record for home runs before Babe Ruth, was born to Irish immigrant parents in Waterbury on July 1, 1857. He started playing baseball as a left-handed third baseman for the Waterbury Monitors in 1876, progressed to Holyoke in 1878 and made his professional debut with Troy, N.Y. in 1880, switching to first base as a result of a dislocated shoulder. In 1883, he became a member of the New York National League team where he would gain his fame and make Waterbury well known in the sports world.

Sporting a 6'3", 220 pound frame, the very popular Connor was a dashing figure with his broad handlebar mustache and confident personality. It is said he was one of the players referred to by his manager that resulted in the team name becoming "Giants". "Dear Old Roger", as he was affectionately called by fans, was a master of the "pop-up" slide and stole many bases - a rarity for a big man - as he led the Giants to two championships.

At various times Connor led the league for a season in batting average, hits, doubles, triples, home runs, runs batted in and walks while wearing a lucky shamrock on his uniform. He was one of the first players to hit three home runs in a game and hit the first home run in the old Polo Grounds. In 1889 he hit such a long home run that a collection was taken at the game to award him a \$500 inscribed watch to mark the occasion.

When Roger retired in 1897 he was the career leader in home runs, triples and walks, second in hits, runs batted in and runs, third in doubles and sixth in average (.317). In an elaborate statistical analysis of players done in 1993, Connor was rated the 29th best of all time.

After the Major Leagues, he played for and managed the Waterbury team, guiding it to the Connecticut League championship in 1898 and 1899. At 42 years of age, the now bespectacled Connor led the League in hitting.

The gentle Connor became a Waterbury school maintenance inspector after his baseball days. For years, the brass weathervane of crossed bats and balls on his home at South Main Street was a local landmark.

Connor died on January 4, 1931 and would remain largely forgotten by baseball until 1974 when Hank Aaron broke Ruth's record and researchers brought to light his brilliant career. He was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1976.

