

Pioneer of video games, Simon dies at 92

December 8 2014



In this Feb. 3, 1977, file photo, Ralph Baer, an engineer for Sanders Associates, Inc., of Nashua, N.H., watches his TV hockey game in this double exposure, in Nashua. Baer, a video game pioneer who created an electronic table tennis game, the precursor to "Pong," and led the team that developed the Magnavox Odyssey, the first home video game console, died Saturday, Dec. 6, 2014. He was 92. (AP Photo/File)

Ralph Baer, a video game pioneer who created both the precursor to "Pong" and the electronic memory game Simon and led the team that developed the first home video game console, has died. He was 92.

Baer, a longtime resident of Manchester, died at his home Saturday, the Goodwin Funeral Home in Manchester confirmed Monday.

Born in Germany, Baer escaped the Holocaust with his family.

He started thinking about what later became the home video game console while working as a television set designer in the 1950s. In the next decade, he started working on television games as chief engineer for Sanders Associates, now BAE Systems.

That led to The Brown Box, which was licensed by Magnavox and came out with the Odyssey in the early 1970s. The console, which connected to a television, could play about two dozen games, including one called "Table Tennis" that was a precursor to "Pong."

His son, Mark Baer, recalled playing early versions of video games on a small black and white TV perched on a shoe stand.

Baer received the National Medal of Technology from President George W. Bush in 2006 and was inducted into the U.S. National Inventors Hall of Fame in 2010.

Before inventing the system that became known as the Magnavox Odyssey, Baer said he often was asked by co-workers how the group would make any money from the project.

"People thought I was wasting my time and the company's money for that matter," he said in 2010. "There's no way anybody could have predicted how fast this industry would take off."



In this July 2009 file picture , German-American game developer Ralph Baer shows the prototype of the first games console, invented by him during a press conference at the Games Convention Online in Leipzig, Germany. The video game pioneer who created both the precursor to "Pong" and the electronic memory game "Simon" has died. Ralph Baer also was leader of the team that developed the Magnavox Odyssey, the first home video game console. Baer, who was born in Germany and escaped the Holocaust with his family, was a longtime resident of Manchester, New Hampshire. The Goodwin Funeral Home confirmed Monday Dec. 8, 2014 that he died at his home Saturday. He was 92. (AP Photo/dpa,Jens Wolf,File)

A version of The Brown Box is now at the American History Museum at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. The Smithsonian plans to open a gallery next year with a focus on innovation and is including Baer's workshop.

Baer later formed his own consulting business, through which he created or assisted in developing numerous electronic toys and games. In Simon,

still in production today, the player has to duplicate an increasingly complicated pattern of lights and sounds.

"He had all kinds of ideas," Mark Baer said, adding that his father had more than 150 patents for items such as cards that talked and a light gun.

"We stepped on the doormat that would talk back to you," he said. "He had a great sense of humor. He'd program it, like you can say anything you want, 'Welcome to my home,' or 'Hey, go away!'"

Mark Baer said his father was working on new ideas up until recently.

Ralph Baer told The Telegraph of Nashua in 2012 that he couldn't stop inventing.

"If you have it in your genes, it's almost like breathing," he said.

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