The Life of Gerald A. Lawson
By Matthew Weber

Do you play video games? Well, you probably do, but have you ever wondered where they came from?

Gerald Lawson started his life a smart child, who only went to the best schools under his mother’s strict eyes. He also had a brother. Gerald was very smart because he wanted to be like his role-model, George Washington Carver, so he studied a lot. At a young age his father introduced him to radios. Little did Gerald’s father know his son would start a radio station inside of his room. Not only did he do that, but soon after he found some scrap parts and started making and selling walkie-talkies. For some extra cash he would repair his neighbors’ TVs. He did all of this being self-taught.

He wanted to share his love for electronics with other people, so he decided to join Silicon Valley’s Homebrew Computer Club. This club had a few people in it that might ring a bell, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, the two founders of Apple. He saw that these people had made their own arcade machines, and Gerald wanted to make his own. A few years later, in 1975, he made an arcade machine called “Demolition Derby” from some parts he found at his new job at Fairchild. Once Fairchild saw this, he got an immediate promotion and started to help develop new games and consoles. He also had the idea for interchangeable games, which were the precursor to disk-games.

With his new success of the Fairchild Channel F, the gaming console he helped develop, he tried to make the first 3D game, but it didn’t work out too well and never got sold.

Gerald thought that if he could get that much success from making video games with Fairchild, he could start his own video game company. Unluckily for him, he only ever made one game for the Atari, called “Color Bar Generator,” which didn’t sell well because of the video game crash in 1983 which lasted until 1985. He did create another very original idea for a game. It was a game called “TV Powww!” where you’d yell “Pow!” in between shows while you were watching ads, and you’d try to hit monsters. This also didn’t work very well, so he eventually retired.

In March 2011 he was honored by the International Game Developers Association as the first major African American in the video game history. Later in the year, he died of a heart attack. This forgotten man was a hero to the video game industry and hopefully, he will be remembered for his great achievements.