

Interview with Russell M. Magnaghi,
His office in Cohodas, Marquette, Michigan
March 25, 2010

Topic: Glenn Seaborg's continuing interaction with his roots Upper Peninsula

Interviewer: Rebecca Leppanen

RM: Okay, good question, just about his roots? Okay, let me just give you a little background. I kind of heard about Glenn Seaborg. And then it wasn't about until the 90s, mm mid 90s or so that I was sent out to Berkeley to do an interview with him and I found him to be a charming individual, no pretensions. And you know I was quite impressed by the man, here is this larger than life individual who played a role nationally and internationally with his chemistry and physics and so on. And kind of what I found was kind of typical, I don't want to say typical "Yooper" but a down to earth individual that was not, you know, kind of giving me some kind of wild physics uh..lecture or something, you know and pushing his field and so on, just a very down to earth person, you know the kind of boy from Ishpeming.

And, um, I, uh, was impressed by the fact that since about 1928 he had kept a diary, a journal, and most of those journals have been published I think into the 19.., well into the 1980s, all of his old journal have been published. I think what we have the published versions of the journals in the archives and there are, I think, transcripts that were not published, that we have as well. In there might be, except what I've pointed out to you, it's going to be somewhat difficult because you would have to then read, you know, year after year, and so on and you're not going to know what, and I don't think they have been indexed that would give you any indication, you know when he came back to Ishpeming.

Now, what I can tell you is that he did have a love for his birthplace and so on. He did have relatives up here. Uh, he had a house, I think it's on...you can probably get the exact address in the old city directory. They'd have it in the, yeah they'd have one of the early versions in the Archives or certainly in the Marquette County or the Peter White Public Library they would have a Marquette County Directory and it would tell you. I think he lived on Wabash Street. And he talked about, and he would talk about very uh, you know he enjoyed talking about growing up in Ishpeming and it wasn't like they went to Southern California, I think they went to Bell Flower, uh what was the town they went to, a suburb of Los Angeles, and then he cut off all connection. He had a great deal of fondness for the area and he had a number of relatives; an uncle, an aunt still living because the only people left were he and his family and so the rest of the Seaborgs remained. And I think even today there's a Seaborg down in Menominee, an engineer, or something, an architect, down in Menominee. And probably the person you might want to check with is someone up in the Development office. I would have a...I don't know in the old days they kept a record of some of these people in case they were having some event or something commemorating Seaborg, but now this was more when he was alive, they would have the

address and they would invite, they'd invite these people. So he would have a connection while he was alive. He had a connection with family members up here.

And he would come up from, you know, talking and so on because I was kind of interested in, "did he return?", you know, "did you return or did you, you know, walk out of the area and never come back?" Uh, but he did return frequently and he talked about, uh, coming up when he was working at the labs, the Aragon Labs, I think, in Chicago and during the War (World War II) there working on the atomic bomb and plutonium part of it and so on and he would come up on trips, uh, you know, by train, would come up and visit people up here. So he was never, even with all of his stature and fame and what not, uh, he was still a very common individual who would come back to his roots. And so he came up during the War on numerous occasions, visited. And then after the War, would return. I don't know how frequent but not like every twenty years or something. But, it was, I would put it in to the frequent category, that he would come back. And, um, I think was kind of, he was kind of sad that the house...that the family house had been sold, you know been sold and so on when they left and the family didn't own it. However, I think it was his uncle that was the immigrant from Sweden and they had a house...they had a house by, I can't quite explain it, it was right near when you are coming on the back road from Negaunee to Ishpeming.

RL: By the Brownstone, on like Division Street.

RM: But it was a little house. It wasn't a big house. But it's where they, it's by the old railway shop type area and you come around the corner and kind of make a sharp turn and the house is right there. And I was impressed by all this because, again, he talked about all of this stuff: about the house, and his uncle, and how he loved the area and so on. It went on and on and on. He would tell stories, for instance of one time it snowed so hard that they were able to ski out of the second, well able, they had to. He skied out of the second story of the house off the roof and then on.

RL: We're putting that clip on SpeakUP.

RM: Is it?

RL: Yeah.

RM: And so he had this love for the, for his origins and so on. And then he talked about this house that his uncle owned and at one point there, I forget the exact year, but it might have been, Vandament was here, so it was before 1997. I don't know if it was 1996 or something but he was coming up here for a visit and he was going to, the plan was he was going to turn the house, the uncle's house, which was a small, relatively small house, but kind of typical of a Swedish

immigrant. So it would have been sort of the ideal place and at some point, I think, I went out there on a number of occasions and interviewed him and then interacted with him and so on. And I did a, which I think is in the Archives, I did a tape of him giving a tour of the house. There wasn't that much to tour. It was like, I don't know, one or two rooms. But anyway we have it. I did a la the Rose Kennedy tour of the John Fitzgerald Kennedy house in Brookline, Massachusetts. Well, we did a kind of similar thing but it wasn't an elaborate place of Seaborg telling you, you know "Welcome to the house and this is the kitchen." It was something like that. You walked into the kitchen or something, wasn't elaborate. But anyway, we had that on, we should have that. It should be some place in the Archives. So then he was coming up, we heard about this you know, and we knew his love for the area and so on. He was coming up to donate the house to Ishpeming. Then I get a phone call from the president's office and he said, Vandament said "There's a problem here because he's coming up but the mayor of Ishpeming is going to sell the house." And it was like, this whole plan, was now unraveled. You know, here this man, with his love of the area and what he wanted to do was to give the house to Ishpeming and then they would, you know, develop it into a typical Swedish immigrant house, and so on, and you could tell about immigrant life with the tour of the house by Seaborg and so on. All of a sudden he's coming up here and it's like...uh, there is no house, you know, that's a problem. And I forget, we talked about, so the idea was to try to bail the situation out and at that time there had been some general talk about developing, kind of a local, living history site on campus, maybe a little collection of buildings and so on, typical of the area, one of those one room school houses. And so I told Vandament and I just kind of threw it out and then he was the president so he'd make the final decision, I said well if that's the case and he's coming to give the house away and they're going to sell the house before he leaves town practically, what if we have the house moved, a wild idea, but maybe you could get unions and so on to get into it and have the house moved to campus and then we could kind of start some kind of a living history thing (with the house and so on?). That obviously didn't get taken far because there'd be money involved in doing that, moving the house. So that didn't get very far. But the other thing about Vandament, now that was, I mean about Seaborg, but that the story I'm telling was sort of towards the end of his life. He came up here often because President Appleberry in the 1980s and not only him but other administrators and faculty and so on thought that it would be nice to honor kind of a hometown boy, Glenn Seaborg, with naming the Center for Mathematics and Science after him and so they named it 'Glenn T. Seaborg Science Center' and so on. And he was taken up with the whole thing and I know we had, well he was taken up with the whole idea.

I found it very interesting because when you went to Berkeley you might say, Nobel Prize winners were almost a dime a dozen. They had like a, by the stadium they had a parking area, you know a special parking area and I think there was a dozen spots or something for Nobel Prize winners that had taught at Berkeley that they might still be teaching or they might be retired but they had a spot there. And but what I found, bottom line was they could really care less about Seaborg, you know. Here, we're making a fuss in the U.P. and so on. But when you

went out there it was like, dime a dozen, 'we got a bunch of other ones that are a lot younger' and so on. And so he was sort of highlighted here with the Seaborg Center and so on. And out there they didn't really care. As a matter of fact, his papers went to, they were seized by the government because of their technical, atomic technical information and I think then that copies were given back of all of his papers and the Library of Congress kept the original, the originals and so on. That why there, I think there are some in our Archives. But...he, so he had this Center named after him. At first you thought well this is one of many, other people have done this. And then I began to realize that no it was, this was it. And then so I found that when we tried to since...well when I went out there, we had, he wanted to give us his papers, what he had in terms of his papers and he had this collection of photographs which was this huge wall bookcase, he had like two or three shelves with all these, all of these binders with all of his pictures from when he was with the Atomic Energy Commission, and pictures with Kennedy and on and on and on. And he, so he, I went up there once and I said 'Could we have all of the photographs and we'll put them in the Archives here?' And he said 'No, no, no. I'm going to need them' or something. And so he allowed me to go through each of these binders, you know, each page of the binder and pull out a second copy. We could have the second copy, not the first copy and this got very complicated with the secretaries and so on. Every photograph had to be Xeroxed and the back and whatever was on the back: identifications, numbers, etcetera, had to be put on the Xerox copy. So anyway I'm pulling these things, it goes on for days and days like it was never going to end, didn't seem to move but we did end up getting all the photographs. Then we he eventually passed away the family gave us all the photographs. So we do have, you might say, the Seaborg stuff has come to the U.P. so his connection with the U.P. is final, is sort of final. So we had all of that and we had papers and what not. And then one day, now when was that...I don't know, maybe, five or six years ago I get a phone call from, well, the thing was when he was alive, the people at the Berkeley Lab, it's a federal laboratory complex up on the hills above the University. At the time, when he was alive there was a lot of commotion, 'We're going to have this. We're going to have a museum to him. We're going to do this. We're going to do that' and so on. And so I kind of backed off with a lot of this stuff because they said they wanted this, that and the other. Now we did, he was very kind to give us, he told me, so you know, I'm there talking to the man and he says, I asked him, you know, would it be possible, maybe, you know, that you would give us some of your gift that people, you know, people of universities and what not had given him. And he turns to me and he says 'Take what you want.' It was like, you know, all this stuff, you know and so we, I, identified it. I didn't want to be a hog and take everything. Identified a lot of pieces and a few weeks later they had been boxed up and they're here in Marquette and so we brought more material back. And I don't want to say that a lot of his stuff has returned home. You might say, because what I found is that the Bancroft Library, which is like the archives of the University of California wanted nothing because I didn't want to get into a cross-fire, you know, with here these people from the U.P., what are they doing, they're taking all of Seaborg's stuff and there's going to be a lot of fighting. I didn't need that. You know, if you want to give the stuff to us and everybody's happy with it, fine. If

we're going to get into some kind of shouting match over it, you know, it's not necessary. The thing was that nobody particularly wanted the, any of his stuff. Now that the library, the science labs said yes they were going to put something up but nothing ever came of it. They didn't do anything. And so as I looked at this, I said, 'you know', and at first I wasn't thinking this way but, you know, 'this stuff really belongs in the U.P.' We seemed to be the only ones that were really concerned about this man and his, you know, his honors he won, the job he did and so on. And so we got the stuff but then sort of the grand finale came in about...maybe '04 or '05, I get a phone call. It's the Berkeley lab. Now this is maybe seven years after he passed away. I don't know, do you know when he passed away?

RL: Uh.. '99.

RM: '99, okay. This would have been six or seven after he passed away. So there was all this talk, they were going to put up this museum and I mean, I saw this first hand because I was there at the at his lab and what not and his office, which was quite a complex. And I talked to the people, and they were like, 'no, no, no' and I said, you know, can we have this and that and 'No, no, no. We're going to have this big museum honoring Seaborg' and so on. So anyway, I get this phone call and they said they're going to send you, do you want, the remainder of Seaborg's stuff. I was like 'Yea, sure.' They said you don't have to pay for it and that might have been part of the conversation to begin with, 'You don't have to pay for it, it's all paid for, everything's been covered', some federal government Berkeley, somebody was going to pay for it. We'll send it to you, sort of, it's on its way. So, I don't know about a week or so later, I get a phone call from the UPS office in Iron Mountain and they said 'Sir, where do you want this stuff delivered.' They said it was some boxes. Well, I said why don't you go and deliver the stuff to Central Receiving here on campus and then we will, we'll distribute it or whatever on campus. So, I remember it was the middle of June and they call me from Central Receiving. They said that the boxes have arrived. Well, it ended up being 400...yea, 450 boxes. I mean it was like an archipelago of islands. They were all on the on the boards, and what not, to be lifted up and it was like one and one and they were, like, all over the place. All of a sudden, half of Central Receiving is filled with these boxes of his stuff. So, I took a deep breath and I thought 'Oh my' they didn't quite tell us there was going to be that much. You know, I thought, one or two boxes and that was the end of it. Well, it was everything, everything they had. Again, all of a sudden nobody out there cared about Seaborg and really his life and the only people that really cared, maybe because we didn't have anything of his or we don't, you know, we're building our Archives. We had, so we got all of his, all of this stuff. So, we ended up with, for instance, 35 boxes of photographs and this including a lot of those photographs that I had taken the copies of. Well, now he was giving us the whole thing. I didn't have to spend several weeks going through these and if you have ever gone through photographs that are in files in a binder, it's a pain, you know, pulling it out and looking at it and so on. All of a sudden, we've got all of that and much more and then there were boxes and boxes of his books that went back to 1928. Well, what do

you do with a 1928 Physics book? I mean, there was just so much you could put on, in terms of an exhibit of Seaborg. You know, here are some of his books and so on, but you're not going to keep the whole thing. So, we eventually just and I mean if it's any book of physics, it's not up to date. So, if you are talking about a historic book that was used by Seaborg, that's about it. So, we pitched a lot of stuff. There were books, like programs, kind of a program type book, written in Russian and things like that. I had chemists come in and physicists from the chemistry and physics department come over take a look at it and I said 'If you figure out what this stuff is and should we keep it, should it go in the library and it'll become part of the library' and so on. So, we did keep a lot of stuff. A lot of stuff was thrown out. It was just we couldn't keep it. And then he had like multiple, multiple copies of articles. You might have an article he did with fifty copies and the archives only wants one or two copies, three copies maybe at the most but not fifty. So all of a sudden this stuffs going out...I'm keeping. So very quickly reduced the pile and I would say that entire, I was quite proud of myself, I had some student working with me. We had the entire pile of stuff in the archival area, so we got it out of, we either dumped it or it went to the library or went someplace and what we had leftover then went into the Archives, into their storage area. And so we ended up with a great collection of material and later on Dr. Mead worked with some of the stuff and her students and so on and brought, is bringing the stuff up to classification and date and where..

RL: There's a whole Seaborg aisle.

RM: So, we have, we now have. So, what you might say is that the memory of Seaborg in his life, he wanted, you know, he had this connection with the U.P. and so on his death we've made the connection back to the U.P. permanent because we brought and his family has sent a lot of this stuff up here. And sort of the bottom line is nobody else wanted it. I mean, I was in a state of shock that they, you know, looked the other way and said take what you want, well go for it.

RL: I thought maybe the family had, like, deemed it towards the university but it was actually...

RM: No, no, no. Now the family did, oh yeah.

RL: Yea.

RM: No, the family...

RL: But it had been in, at California...

RM: No, no, no. There were two collections. There was like his private items from the house and that I had, we had worked with the family. I and former President Vandament had worked with the family and they gave us a lot of the material, from his, from his home collection, most

of it, they went and sent in boxes and what not. Process, never sent me a bill for any of it, which is fine with me, fine with us. But we had all of that, but this, these 450 boxes that was from the library...the science. What is it called? The Berkeley, it's just called the Berkeley Science Lab. They were sending us all this stuff. So it wasn't from the family. We were getting, we were now getting everything. We have everything that's available. So, it sort of came home then when we look at it that way. But he came back many times in the summertime for a visit, visiting his family and what not. Then after the Seaborg Center, they wanted to do, the idea was and over the years, it's my observation, I might be wrong I might be right, the Seaborg Center is kind of is not as strong as it was in the past. So, but it then, it too becomes a monument to the man who was born here and the thing was he only lived here for ten years. He was born in 1912 and they left in 1922 which kind of blew me away because I thought we were going to have a whole story of Seaborg growing up and high school, Ishpeming High School so on and so on. And in 1922, so he was about 10, his mother decided that the educational possibilities and institutions in the U.P. were not up to what she thought they should be and they should leave. So they left for him to get a better education, which, I don't know if he did or not but he did go on, he did use what he did learn. So they kind of packed up and left and it was like uh-oh, now what do we do, you know, how do you, put that into a museum exhibit. Oh, education was so bad that the family left. No, no, no no. We don't want to that, you know. That's not an area you go into. So anyway that's kind of the end and then he would return for these trips and there was this one time at the house.

RL: Did you meet him then?

RM: What?

RL: Did you meet him then?

RM: And then, oh yeah. Then when he came up here, he would have meetings with the, with us and I got because I was gathering the material and bringing it back and so on. And then we even went out there, he had famous, it was the Seaborg Medal and it was for the former football player of the UC-Berkeley team, who had gone on and done well in their field of endeavor. And so for instance, we, when I went out there, they gave the award, the Seaborg award to a cardio, cardiologist from the Twin Cities. I forget his name but he went, he got the award. So, Seaborg was kind of a closet football, wanted to be a football player. He even said it. But here you had this tall, gangly man and then I knew he had a horrible arthritis, his fingers were, I don't think he could move them and when he ate he would just kind of put his hands together and then take a glass and just kind of pour it down but he couldn't move, his fingers couldn't really move. But he came back on a number of occasions and the thing about Seaborg was that for his journal he wanted everybody that ever attended an event. I don't know if I mentioned this to you. And so we were having this event when he was here, we were having, we were going to have a

luncheon. It was like...it was after school was out. It might have been like mid-May. It was kind of a bright, sunny day and the History Department gives the Waldo Award. The Waldo award is named after the first president, the first Head of the History Department or the only Head of the History Department..? The president taught history for the first five years or so. And so we give the Waldo Award to a person that has done something over and above to promote history and the work of our students, etcetera. And Vandament had done that, he'd provided jobs and so on. So anyway, we're giving him this Waldo Award and we're having this lunch and we had, I don't know, we had a big table there in the Charcoal Room that was filled with people. I don't know what groups were there but they were all students. And so we told, I told President Vandament, I said, well you know, you guys we're getting done and I was there as well. We were getting done with the meeting, why don't we go and, you know, we'll go to lunch and Vandament said, you know, can we bring Seaborg, the Seaborgs and so on. He and his wife were, "Yea sure" you know. And so we had the Seaborgs there, but one of his things was he wanted to know everybody that was at the meal. So, knowing this was going to be a request and I wasn't going to be able to go and recreate the list, I immediately sent a, without him telling me, sent around a sheet of paper and everybody signed in and then when it was over, we gave him the sheet of paper. He was delighted with it. But he came up here many times and then he would also come up for, you know, to visit relatives and then when we had the Seaborg Center, he would come up for the Seaborg, some event or something. But he would also kind of teach classes so there were some and there are some students, they might not be students at Northern and maybe they're even graduated but there were students, who as small, smaller tykes, ah maybe a little older even, met Seaborg when he was here. So, it was kind of, I would tell the students, like when we had this lunch, I said well you know come on over because this is going to be opportunity to visit with this icon and this older fellow and you're not going to miss that opportunity. So, it was, but he...he would come up here and teach, kind of teach classes and talk to students and what not.

RL: What, like around what time was it or period?

RM: Well this would have been, I would say all through the '80s and '90s.

RL: Oh.

RM: In the 19...I would have to check the date here, but in...(looking in book). Glenn Seaborg. Okay.

RL: So the house in Ishpeming, did it end up being sold?

RM: Well, no then that got very unclear because they decided, I think at the last minute, not to sell the place. So I don't know what the status of the house is.

RL: Because I've never, I'm from Ishpeming. I've never heard anything about it.

RM: Yeah...

RL: No kind of memorial.

RM: There might have been some talk of moving it to that theme park area over by the Mather A. But I don't think that was done or anything happened. It was sort of...after he passed away, kind of interesting to see that. After he passed away, things just kind of declined, you know. Nobody was saying, you know, we're going to keep his material or it should come to Northern or so on and as a matter of fact, in the year, maybe 2000, we went out to, well my wife and I went out to Berkeley...no, no.

Anyway, we, I came up with the idea of replicating his office from the very beginning and so we got all the artifacts. We got pictures, and videos of the, of the room. We got the telephone, all the paper boxes on his desk and we brought the whole thing, we got the whole thing, we got the plans. I called the engineers office at Berkeley, 'Do you have plans of this office?' and so on and so on, 'Yes, we do.' They sent us the office plans. So we would be in a position now of replicating Seaborg's office, you know, as it was. Now what happened was, the question was 'Where are we put this?', you know, and again kind of coming back to, coming full circle and bringing Seaborg and his memory back. So we came up with the idea that there was space in what was going to be over in the Seaborg Center, there was supposed to be a store on the corner there by the exhibits and that never materialized. The store didn't. So we had this room. So my wife, who was kind of doing the museum work at the time, said 'Oh, okay let's see what we can do.' So anyway we had his desk, his original desk. We have the lamp he had on the desk. We had, basically we were able to create, recreate his office at the time of his death. And so we went, we put that together and so for ten years the desk sat in this giant shipping crate. We had opened it once to look at it and that was like it. In it was his telephone, all the stuff and what not, was in the desk, sat there. Then finally after about ten years, somebody found the money to put into recreating the office. And so, I'm trying to think, maybe it's been about three years, four years that we had a dedication of the office and what not, at one of the Sonderegger Symposiums. But that's sort of, that's now you can go, I don't know if you've seen it, but if you go over to the science building you go to that...

RL: Glenn Seaborg Center?

RM: You go to the Seaborg Center there at the entrance is his office. You push the and the button stays on for about fifteen seconds and you have the, an idea of what it was like and it's pretty accurate.

RL: Okay.

RM: So that's kind of the Seaborg story of, I'm trying to think is there any...

RL: Did he really have any say in, as to what was going to go into the Center? Or was it more, he was on the Board or...

RM: I don't know if he was on the Board. He didn't...he would save things for future use and what not, you know, like artifacts and so on. But there when it came down to, he didn't, he wasn't an imposing person, where he was imposing himself upon you. So you didn't get that feeling. But he was certainly happy when this stuff came about and, you know, we did with the Seaborg Center delighted him and then we had...I'm trying to think, he was up here for and event and we...I'm trying to think. But he was up here for a lot of it. He was sort of in and out and then he came frequently with the opening, that's what I was getting at. I got side tracked. With the opening of the Seaborg Science Center, then he would come up. He worked with students. He, you know, worked with senior faculty and what not. So he was a given precedence and people remember him but part of the problem is that is unless you do some type of this stuff and then save the dwelling, etcetera, you're not going to remember the guy. You know, the guy's going to get lost. So when you save the material, you can put his office up and so on. Because I find, myself, Seaborg to younger people, nobody knows anything about him. I know about him because I was there. I worked with him. I talked to him. We did things. We pulled things together and so on. But younger people go 'what's this'. So he's, I would probably say as kind of a conclusion Seaborg and his stuff, his body is still out in Berkeley or Lafayette, but he's kind of come full circle in terms of his memory and trying to preserve it, you know. All the material has come back and we're in a position and we can put on exhibit of Seaborg without much trouble.

RL: And in his interview, like, even at eighty years old, eighty plus years, he was like, very lucid and ...

RM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

RL: So to be teaching at that age is surprising, too.

RM: Yeah, well I think there were some surprised students when he came back, you know, he was coming back 'Oh, let me show you how this works' and so on. And if you knew who the guy was, it was like 'whoa, okay you're the guy from the encyclopedia, Seaborg and so on.' And then he was very proud of some, he went online or something, he found that there was, I don't know, some humongous number of pages dedicated to him that he had written about. I forget what was his bibliography, that was it.

RL: Yeah.

RM: He went online one time and 'You know what I found...oh there was like 3,000 articles that I had done' and so on. And I think he tried to get a lot of that stuff shipped back here. So you start, even if you took two or three volumes, you know, issues of stuff that he had written, all of a sudden you almost filling this room with two or three issues. So, but I feel that he's kind of come full circle after all this time and he's back, his stuff is back here in the U.P. As opposed to being out in, say, Berkeley or UCLA, Los Angeles, etcetera, so on. People could care less about Seaborg.

RL: I mean that's sad that he gets glossed over. The father of the [atomic bomb].

RM: Yeah. He is just kind of forgotten, yeah, kind of forgotten about. Part of it is, when you're from the area, you're kind of more interested in preserving your culture, well I am certainly preserving the culture and doing the, you know, ?, the office space and so on and so on. I was interested in doing that and with the idea of bringing him, sort of bringing his memory back to the U.P. and it's there. People wanna dive into it and become familiar with it. If they don't...well at least I've done my part. So, he was a very typical Yooper, very wonderful, down to earth, down to earth person.

RL: Were you surprised at how good his memory was? Because he talks about things from when he was like seven or eight years old.

RM: Yeah, no, he was up there. No it was just, you know, kind of him. You're sort of expecting it from him, you know. But yeah, he didn't have any memory lapses. Oh, you got some problems here. No, he was very, very together.

RL: He was very clear. Okay.

RM: That pretty much cover it for you?

RL: I guess, besides that luncheon are there any other specific times you remember meeting him or having conversations with him?

RM: Mmmm...no that was it. You know, actually when he came to Marquette he was usually busy with the meetings and doing things and checking the equipment in the lab. So you really, so when he came to Marquette, he really didn't have a lot of time to meet with him. So most of the conversations and what not, the interviews were done out in Berkeley where we had time to, you know, to meet with him. Then we had some of these events that he joined us, or either joined us with, for, but I didn't do any interviews with him here. They were all done out in

Berkeley, where he kind of had more time. And then see the, in the Hall of Sciences...there was some talk of getting the American Chemical Association and some other companies to put money to help develop some of his stuff, like the recreation of the rooms (?), the Archives, maybe more of a museum. And in terms of the museum, there was supposed to be on the, you know you have the entry floor on the street level there then you go to the second floor, above it you've probably seen the big circular area up there, kind of like a quasi tower. Well that was supposed to be his museum that whole circular area and that never became a museum. I mean I have plans, you know, stuff of what we should be doing, so on, but for whatever reason it was never done. And so today it's kind of a, I don't know, a meeting room, they've got some stuff piled up there, sort of a room you don't want to go into. It's sort of like the mystery room, what's this for but originally that was supposed to be the grand plan was, that was going to be the big entry area of the museum. You'd go up there and you'd have this.

RL: Well, we can end there then.

Rebecca Leppanen
HS 336, Dr. Magnaghi
April 6, 2010

The Continuing Connection with the Upper Peninsula: Glenn T. Seaborg

The amount of information found on Glenn T. Seaborg, 1951 Nobel Prize laureate, is vast due to his personal chronicling of his life's works and achievements. He wrote almost every day in his journal, starting in 1927, no matter how mundane or repetitive the events. As years passed, his writings became very scientifically elaborate, especially while working on the Manhattan Project in Chicago. Because of Seaborg's detailed writings covering all of his daily happenings, Seaborg made it possible to track down how often and when Seaborg spoke of his roots and when he and his family visited the Upper Peninsula. The greatest difficulty in such a project rests in the sorting through and reading the many volumes of his published journals. In this study, the information came from a 1996 interview with Seaborg, a 2010 interview with Dr. Magnaghi and a sampling of his journals covering the periods 1927 to 1942, 1944 to 1945, a 1945 to 1960 appendix of press clippings, 1961 to 1971. Research was limited to these dates due to preliminary viewings of the other journals showed no relative information and later journals could not be located in the Records Center of Northern Michigan University.¹ After assessing the sampling it became apparent that Glenn Seaborg kept close to him his Ishpeming and Swedish roots, but within the sampling only a handful of accounts given place Seaborg back in the Upper Peninsula.

Glenn T. Seaborg was best known as the father of the atomic bomb, having co-discovered the element plutonium that went into making the bomb.² His discoveries supported the usage of the nuclear energy. He worked himself into a world class chemist and physicist, having won a

¹ The Glenn T. Seaborg collection is cataloged but has yet to be arranged in the Record Center.

² Daniel E. Koshland, Jr., "Glenn Seaborg, 19 April 1912-25 February 1999", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 4 (2005) : 619-623 in JSTOR [database online]. 1 March 2010.

Nobel Prize in Chemistry.³ What remains surprising, today, is that little physical credit or merit appears in his hometown of Ishpeming to laud Seaborg. There is no plaque bringing attention to the previous homes that Seaborg and his family occupied, especially the home on Wabash Street, Ishpeming.⁴ With such a notable man having roots from the area, some sort of visible marker should be erected to honor the Ishpeming native. The Wabash house currently looks like any other house of the area: modest and small, slightly in disrepair. The rooftop that Seaborg had once described as skiing along when a big snowstorm hit Ishpeming, now holds a modern television satellite-dish.⁵

A 1996 interview of Seaborg reveals that at eighty-four years of age, his sharp memory recalled many of his boyhood memories of the area. He remembered the huge ski culture of the time and how many days were spent on skis, navigating the snowy terrain of Ishpeming. Once in southern California, he may not have seen snow again for a while but the memory remained of his cold beginnings in the Upper Peninsula. Coincidentally, one of Seaborg's cousins of the area, John Seaborg, acted as the architect during the building of the Ski Hall of Fame, located in Ishpeming. As for visits to his hometown, Seaborg only mentions in an interview that he went in 1939 after his graduation from graduate school at Berkeley. Another time he made it up in 1952 while he was in Chicago. Then he met his parents in Ishpeming in 1954 for the centennial celebration. So these dates were pretty far apart in terms of the spacing from 1922 not until 1939 and then not until 1952. After 1954 though, his visits then got more frequent. He was proud to

³ Koshland, 620.

⁴ Glenn T. Seaborg, *Journal of Glenn T. Seaborg: January 1, 1927-April 17, 1942*, 1, (Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, University of California reprinted 1994), xxiii.

⁵ Glenn T. Seaborg, interviewed by Russell M. Magnaghi, tape recording, 21 March, 1996, Central Upper Peninsula and NMU Archives Oral History Collection, Marquette, Michigan.

show off his past and around the town of his childhood to his children. When the Seaborg Center came to head, Seaborg visited as part of the advisory board.⁶

As seen in the early years of his journal, Glenn Seaborg was still receiving and writing letters from Ishpeming. One of these letters was to a boy named Clarence Larson, who was one of his childhood friends from Ishpeming. Larson supplied Seaborg with some information about things happening in Ishpeming. One letter describes a bush the Seaborg and his friends had planted in Ishpeming's New York location and how it had now grown to three and a half feet. Seaborg mentioned a couple replies but then the letter stopped coming from Larson.⁷ There is, however, a gap that must be accounted for from the time Seaborg left in 1922 until 1927, the latter marks when he started writing in a daily journal. Larson and Seaborg may have exchanged many other letters throughout those years.

One of the factors that contributed to Seaborg's family leaving Ishpeming for California was that his aunt and uncle and their five children had already moved there, giving the Seaborgs a base in which to continue their Swedish heritage. The Seaborgs and the Johnsons lived across from each other in Home Gardens, California.⁸ Another pull factor for the Seaborgs, especially his mother Selma, was the possibility of better education in California.⁹ Although, Seaborg left when he was ten, he still had an appreciation with his primary school teachers from Ishpeming. He included pictures in his published journals of his teachers Marie Olson (taken in 1966) and Lyda Gill (taken in 1980).¹⁰

Other indications of Seaborg's ties to his Ishpeming past were visitors and other families that moved to California. The Perlstroms were one of these families that the Seaborgs kept

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Seaborg, *1927-1942*, 6,8,16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹ Seaborg, interview, 1996.

¹⁰ Seaborg, *1927-1942*, xvi.

connections with and frequently had dinners with them.¹¹ The family of Carl Lehman also had moved to California in nearby Long Beach. The Lehmans and Seaborgs frequently visited each other. In the summer of 1927, a former neighbor of their Wabash home residence, Anna Carlson, visited California.¹² Another entry in his journal mentions a group of tourists who happened to be from Negaunee, Michigan, a neighboring city of Ishpeming.¹³

Seaborg made the effort in 1962 in delivering the commencement speech for Northern Michigan University, showing that he was still involved and interested in the area.

Dr. Russell M. Magnaghi talked about a family home that Seaborg wanted to give to the city of Ishpeming in a 2010 interview. The house that Seaborg's grandparents had owned, which had also been the house that his father was raised in, in Ishpeming, Seaborg bought in the late 1980s to help out financially the couple that was then occupying it. He bought it for a minimal price. He had plans to designate it as a living museum of the Seaborg family and also as a Swedish heritage museum. Seaborg planned to give the house to the City of Ishpeming as a gift, in hopes that they would restore and create this living museum.

The plan for the house was to turn it into a living museum depicting a typical Swedish immigrant home during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Seaborg made an effort to not only better the city but to also bring in tourism and a historical preservation project to Ishpeming. According to Dr. Magnaghi, the plans fell through and Magnaghi tried to bring the house then the campus of Northern Michigan University as part of plans for a living history display there. This plan, also, failed to succeed.

Seaborg had made a mark on the campus of Northern Michigan University. As part of the science complex, the Seaborg Mathematics and Science Center now occupies a wing of the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

Luther S. West Science building. The Center includes a display recreating a replica of Seaborg's University of California-Berkeley office, including his actual desk and lamp and props. The documents and photos and all of his papers from the Berkeley collection of Glenn Seaborg now reside in the Central Upper Peninsula and NMU Archives. Dr. Magnaghi felt that his work has come full circle by returning to the Upper Peninsula.¹⁴

One of the things that Seaborg can be seen as detracting from his Swedish heritage was adding another 'n' to his first name. But Seaborg knew his roots and his family lines and this did nothing to deter his interest in his familial heritage. During a 1996 interview, Seaborg gave almost his complete genealogy on the spot, listing parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles and cousins going back to Sweden.¹⁵ Year after year in his journals, Seaborg described the same Swedish feast his mother would prepare for Christmas Eve dinner for their family including his uncle's family that lived across the street in Home Gardens. This feast included lutefisk, Swedish meat balls, *sill* (pickled herring), saffron buns with raisins, gingersnaps in the form of goblins, piglets, stars and other patterns, *lingonberries*, *risgryn* (rice pudding) which was topped with cinnamon, cream and sugar, and pepper kaka.¹⁶

From pure speculation, Seaborg's involvement in the Manhattan Project prevented him from leaving Chicago to head to the Upper Peninsula. He had many experiments and meetings every day to attend. Although, he did find time daily to shoot some rounds of golf on the

¹⁴ Russell M. Magnaghi, interviewed by Rebecca Leppanen, 25 March 2010.

¹⁵ Seaborg, 1996 interview.

¹⁶ Seaborg, *1927-1942*, 40, 87, 155.

Chicago links.¹⁷ In 1970, Seaborg made a trip to Ishpeming to attend a luncheon in his honor, hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, in which he received an honorary membership.¹⁸

Just listening to an interview of him one can sense that Seaborg was a down to earth man and this was supported through a couple of people's accounts from the times they had met the Nobel laureate. In a short biography by Daniel E. Koshland Jr., he noted of Seaborg claiming, "He liked the honors he received but never let them get to his head or diminish his sense of responsibility and his amusement over life."¹⁹ After meeting with Seaborg, Dr. Magnaghi shared this outlook of him, viewing him as a very charming, very down to earth man.²⁰

For such a distinguished man and one so in tune with his childhood past, few tangible proclamations of his fame and genius were created in honor and memory of Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg, the world class chemist. Currently, no one has written an official biography of Seaborg and there are no markers in his hometown to indicate the homes of the Seaborg family. What does stand in his honor is the Glenn T. Seaborg Science and Mathematics Center at Northern Michigan University, a couple short biographies, including one in a local history booklet on Ishpeming and an online Wikipedia article.

¹⁷ Glenn T. Seaborg, *Journal of Glenn T. Seaborg, Chief, Section C-1, Metallurgical Laboratory, Manhattan Engineer District 1942-1946: May 1, 1944-April 30, 1945*, 3, (Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, University of California reprinted 1992).

¹⁸ "C-C Hosts Dr. Seaborg At Luncheon," *Mining Journal*, 11 September, 1970: found in *Journal of Glenn T. Seaborg, Chairman, U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, 1961-1971, Appendix* (Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, University of California 1989), 391.

¹⁹ Koshland, 622.

²⁰ Magnaghi, 2010 interview.