

4 Section 2 Chicago Tribune, Wednesday, February 6, 1991 N S

Disney home is proposed as landmark

By Teresa Wiltz

In 1970, ten minutes after closing the deal on her new house, the real estate agent casually informed June Saathoff, "Oh, by the way, Walt Disney was born in your house."

Saathoff didn't bat an eye.

"It's just a house," Saathoff says now. "It's not a big mansion, it's a home. I find it interesting from a historical perspective. But people get all excited over it. I find that amazing."

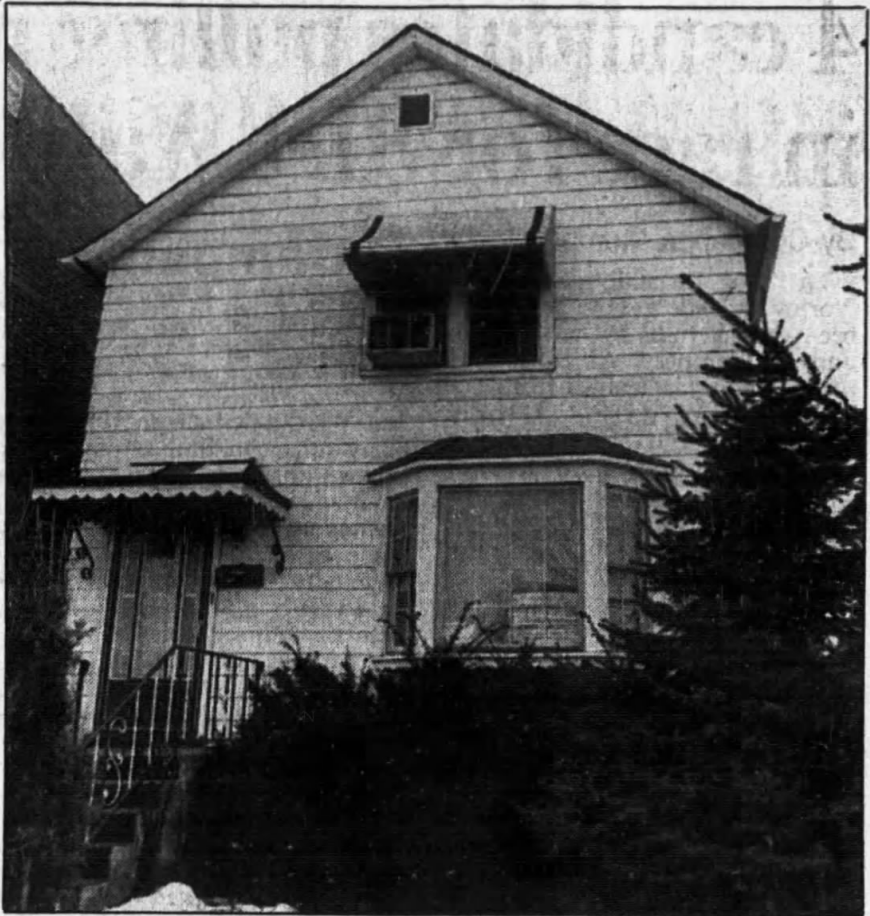
But with recent efforts to designate Disney's birthplace a Chicago landmark, Saathoff's North Tripp Avenue home will become more than "just a house."

On Wednesday the Chicago Commission on Landmarks will hear arguments for conferring landmark status on the Near Northwest Side cottage. It is the first time a famous person's birthplace has been nominated to be a city landmark, said Tim Samuelson, a commission historian.

"It's certainly an overlooked part of Chicago," said Samuelson. "His career is associated almost exclusively with Hollywood. But the story of the Disneys struggling to make good parallels the experiences of many young families in Chicago at the turn of the century."

The Disney home is a modest affair, which Disney's father, Elias, built by hand in 1892 on a \$750, 25-by-125-foot lot. It was there that Walter Disney was born on Dec. 5, 1901.

By 1906, the Disney family moved to a farm in Marceline, Mo. The family returned to Chicago in



Tribune photo by Ovie Carter

The house on North Tripp Avenue near Armitage Avenue where Walt Disney was born has been proposed as a city landmark.

1917, where Walt Disney enrolled in McKinley High School for his senior year. That home, on the Near West Side, was torn down.

The Disney family has rejected attempts to turn the Missouri farmhouse into "somewhere you go and pay homage to Walt Disney," said David Smith, the Walt Disney Co. archivist in Burbank, Calif.

"But obviously, the birthplace is a landmark," said Smith. "Chicago should recognize him as one of their favorite sons."

Becoming a landmark is a drawn-out process that can take from

three to six months, said commission director William McLenahan. The Planning Commission and the City Council members all have their say before the City Council votes on the formal designation.

But Saathoff says she isn't so sure that designation is what she wants. In fact, she says, she is frequently amazed by others' fascination with her home.

"I used to get a kick out of telling people," Saathoff said. "Disney provided more happiness than anyone else in this country. But it's my house, and it has my personality."