

HISTORIC NAME: Gag, Wanda, Childhood House

COUNTY: Brown

CURRENT NAME:

CITY/TWP.: New Ulm

LEGAL DESC.: B108N, Front 1/2 Lot 8

ADDRESS:
226 N. Washington

CLASSIFICATION:

Building X
Structure _____
Object _____
District _____

CONDITION:

Excellent _____
Good X
Fair _____
Deteriorated _____

SIGNIFICANCE:

Local _____
State X
National _____

THEME/S:

Primary Literature
Secondary Art
Others _____OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: Yes _____ No X Restricted _____

PRESENT USE:

VISIBLE FROM THE ROAD: Yes X No _____

Residence

OCCUPIED: Yes X No _____

DATE CONSTRUCTED: ca. 1898

ORIGINAL USE: Residence

ORIGINAL OWNER: unknown

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown

OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS: Minnie Grausam
201 S. State
New Ulm, MN 56073ACREAGE: Less than one acre X

LOCAL CONTACT/Org.:

UTM REFERENCE:

15 / 383120 / 4907580

FORM PREPARED BY: Dennis Gimmetad

New Ulm Quad.

DATE: January 1979

DESCRIPTION:

The Wanda Gag Childhood Home is located on a residential street in New Ulm roughly five blocks from the downtown area.

The two-story frame house was constructed in a Queen Anne-shingle builders style with a multi-sided two-story porch tower (now enclosed) at the southwest corner. The front section includes gable returns and a triangular window at the attic level; the north-south gable has jerkin ends. A two-sided oriel window projects from the second story on the northern facade.

The original clapboard-and-cut-shingle sheathing of the house has been covered with siding, and a one-story, full-front porch has been added.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Author-artist Wanda Gag, best known for her children's classic Millions of Cats, lived at 226 South Washington in New Ulm from her early childhood until 1913, when she left to enroll in art school in the Twin Cities at the age of 20.

Wanda's father, Anton Gag, a New Ulm painter-decorator, acquired the house for a growing family in the 1890s. He himself was a local artist who depicted a number of scenes from the 1862 Sioux attack on New Ulm; one such mural now hangs at the Minnesota State Capitol.

Wanda left New Ulm for four years in Minneapolis-St. Paul and then moved to the east coast. Richard Cox, in an article in the fall, 1975 issue of Minnesota History, cites her Millions of Cats, which appeared in 1927, as "the prototype for the picture book, defined as one in which a single artist conceives, writes, illustrates, and supervises the printing of the whole book project." This book, and her successful water color and print show as the Wythe Gallery in 1926, established her reputation in the art world.

Cox, in the same article, cites in Wanda's diary a description of her New Ulm childhood: ". . . in an atmosphere of Old World customs and legends, of Bavarian and Bohemian folk songs, of German Marchen (fairy tales or folklore) and Turnverein activities." Later, he comments "The emergence of this remarkable artist is due in large part to her early experiences in Minnesota. In New Ulm, St. Paul, and Minneapolis, she saw prejudice and exploitation, had to learn to overcome rumor and innuendo, formed opinions about social and political issues, first experimented with abstract art, and made crucial career decisions."

The family home at 226 North Washington is significant as the most readily identifiable site in the state associated with the important early years in Wanda Gag's life.