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Wilson, Ivan, 1889-1981 (MSS 356)

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Descriptive Inventory

MSS 356 WILSON, Ivan, 1889-1981

5 boxes. 88 folders. 829 items. 1918-2003. Originals, photocopies, typescripts, photographs, cassette tape.

1981.91.1; 1986.129.1; 2010.39.1; 2010.142.2

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ivan Wilson, the son of Joseph Newton Wilson and Ellen Ora Nix, was born on 29 July 1889 in Hazel, a farming community in Calloway County, Kentucky. From youth, he was fond of sketching and drawing and aspired to be an artist. In 1911, Wilson came to Bowling Green to complete his high school work at the Western Kentucky State Normal School, now Western Kentucky University (WKU). He studied at the Normal School in the winter and spring, and for the remainder of the year taught art in rural schools in Kentucky and Tennessee. As Wilson's slight frame (5' 4" and barely more than 100 pounds) made him eligible for only limited military service, he spent six months in 1918-1919 stationed at Camp Zachary Taylor in Louisville. On 24 December 1922, Wilson married Emma Meador Allbritten (1891-1977), also a native of Calloway County.

In 1920, when Wilson was still a student, WKU's president, Henry Hardin Cherry, appointed him as an instructor in art and penmanship. In the summers of 1922-1924, he continued his own studies at the Chicago Art Institute. In order to retain his teaching job and fulfill the requirement that department heads possess master's degrees, Wilson finally received his A. B. degree from WKU in 1931, then earned his master's degree in 1933 from George Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee. Wilson remained a faculty member of WKU's art department until his retirement in 1958, serving as department head until 1946.

Although he painted in oil during his early years, in 1934 Wilson embraced watercolors, finding that they allowed him to express himself "infinitely better." He was prolific in the medium, almost always painting from memory or imagination and concentrating on landscapes, outdoor scenes and rural structures. Wilson also produced a number of works depicting WKU buildings and scenes. In 1970, Wilson estimated that he had painted more than 3,700 watercolors.

Wilson enjoyed a long teaching career and positively influenced many students, some of whom later assisted him in exhibiting his work. He was always conscious, however, of the financial constraints that had kept him from further study at the Chicago Art Institute and bound him to the classroom instead of painting full time. A gentle and retiring man (who nevertheless was fond of calling himself "Ivan the Terrible"), he also felt keenly the stresses of managing

WKU's art department, which included defending the program's relevance and mourning its deficiencies in equipment and staffing. After a health breakdown prompted his resignation as department head in 1946, Wilson began to look toward retirement. Where he had previously been reticent about exhibiting or selling his paintings, he became more interested in doing so as a way of earning income. In the 1950s, he arranged for the Studio Guild of New York to circulate thirty of his watercolors, and in 1961, with the help of a former student, artist Joe Dudley Downing, Wilson secured a one-man show at the Raymond Duncan Gallery in Paris, France. Ultimately, Wilson's work was exhibited at universities, museums, galleries and other venues in twenty states.

Before and after his retirement in 1958, Wilson also pursued several hobbies including etymology, piano, gardening, writing, Bible study and "herpetology – the snake phase." A devotee of nature, he enjoyed hiking and accompanying a colleague, WKU English professor John H. Clagett, on hunting and fishing trips. He and Emma also traveled extensively throughout the United States, usually by train, allowing Wilson to gather subject matter for his paintings.

In 1969, Wilson and his wife left their Bowling Green home at 1576 Normal Drive and moved back to Hazel, Kentucky. Emma Wilson died on 24 March 1977 and Ivan Wilson on 1 February 1981. To honor his contribution to art education at WKU, the university dedicated the Ivan Wilson Center for Fine Arts in October, 1973.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The Collection.

Kate (Clagett) Duncan, "Ivan Wilson: A Neighbor's View," Browning Club Paper, April 1973, WKU University Archives.

Ivan Wilson, Faculty-Staff Papers, WKU University Archives.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists of correspondence, journals, drawings, sketches, written compositions and clippings relating to the life and career of Ivan Wilson. Also included are photographs, the originals of which have been transferred to the Kentucky Library and photocopies retained in the folders. Not included in the inventory below are the approximately 150 paintings by Ivan Wilson housed in the Kentucky Museum.

Box 1 contains Wilson's personal and professional correspondence, journals and other writings. Early materials in this box include a typescript of his diary, kept at Camp Zachary Taylor during his military service in 1918-1919 (Folder 2); a 1931 paper discussing the role of art in the elementary school curriculum (Folder 3); and correspondence of Wilson and his wife relating to his artwork and 1935 European study tour with the artist George S. Dutch (Folder 4). Box 1, Folder 5 includes memoranda relating to Wilson's needs for the WKU art department during the 1930s and 1940s and his request to resign as department head in 1946. Box 1, Folder 6 contains a journal and sketches relating to Wilson's 1935 European trip. Box 1, Folder 7 contains a datebook with brief entries for 1946, the year Wilson requested to be

relieved of his duties as WKU's art department head. Box 1, Folders 8 and 9 contain letters, drafts, and miscellaneous writings of Wilson, including short stories and anecdotes. Notable in Folder 8 is an affectionate letter to WKU president Kelly Thompson, a memorial to Thompson's son Hardin, and a fond remembrance of Wilson's Irish setter "Poody." Of interest in Folder 9 are Wilson's letters to the U. S. Patent Office about a design for "rain pants," and his letter to a local judge requesting leniency for a colleague, Hardin Field McChesney, who had been fined for illegal parking.

Box 1, Folder 10 contains correspondence relating to the Ford Motor Company's interest in using Wilson's artwork for a 1951 story about Bowling Green in the *Lincoln-Mercury Times*. Box 1, Folder 11 contains letters Wilson wrote in 1951-1952 to the widow and daughter of his colleague, John H. Clagett, during travels with Emma in California, the Southwest and New England. Box 1, Folder 12 includes Wilson's letters, some fragmentary or in draft, to the artist and designer Frederic Whitaker, president of the American Watercolor Society. In the course of seeking Whitaker's critique of his art, Wilson discusses his life and work in some detail. Box 1, Folder 13 contains drafts and correspondence relating to Wilson's problems with one of his students, a talented basketball player named Ralph Crosthwaite. This material presents an interesting portrait of a teacher's anguish over a student-athlete's poor attitude and lack of cooperation in class.

Box 1, Folder 14 contains various writings of Wilson, primarily with religious themes. Box 1, Folder 15 contains a cassette tape of greetings to Wilson and Emma from Edison H. Thomas. Thomas, a journalist, artist and former student, speaks of his travel and activities, discusses other artists, and performs on the piano and organ. Box 1, Folder 16 contains a journal of Wilson's trip to New Orleans in 1949 and includes a restaurant menu.

Box 2 contains sketches, drawings and cartoons of Ivan Wilson. Most are done in pencil and depict structures, outdoor scenes, and buildings or views of the WKU campus. Wilson drew the cartoons in Folder 21 while hospitalized in Murray, Kentucky from February to May, 1927; they include whimsical depictions of fishing, hunting and nature expeditions with John H. Clagett, and of Wilson's medical treatment.

Box 3 contains clippings, programs and correspondence relating to exhibitions of Wilson's work. Included are materials relating to Wilson's 1945 exhibit at Kansas City's Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Folder 9), his mid-1950s shows arranged through the Studio Guild (Folders 15, 18-20), and his 1961 show at the Raymond Duncan Gallery in Paris (Folder 22). The clippings have been photocopied on acid-free paper and the originals discarded.

Box 4 contains miscellaneous photographs, personal documents and clippings relating to or collected by Wilson. Folder 1 includes photographs of Wilson, and Folder 2 includes a group photo of a reunion of Emma Wilson's family, the Allbrittens. Folder 3 contains handwritten calling cards created by Wilson. Folder 4 contains notes on Wilson's tax deductions for 1964. Folder 5 includes a 1977-1978 list of buyers of Wilson's paintings and prices paid. Folder 6 contains a 1969 *Park City Daily News* article reporting on the Wilsons' move back to Hazel, Kentucky. Folder 7 contains a 1964 exhibit program and photos relating to Wilson's former student, Joe Dudley Downing. Folder 8 contains information relating to the Mary Ed McCoy Hall Gallery at Murray State University, and Folder 9 contains clippings relating to African-American artist Ellis Wilson. Folder 10 contains a poem by a Bowling Green pastor, Samuel Ragland, and his obituary. Folder 11 contains clippings related to various artists, and Folder 12 contains photographs of locomotives used by Wilson to compose

paintings. Folder 13 contains collected clippings and two photos relating to Wilson's interest in snakes.

Box 5, Folders 1-8 contain letters from Ivan Wilson (although he often adds Emma's name) to architect Edward Austin Duckett and his wife, Blanche. Duckett was a former student of Wilson's who left school to enter military service, then graduated from Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology. Folder 1 contains a single letter to Duckett written in 1943, together with some biographical clippings on Duckett and his wife. Folders 2 through 8 contain Wilson's letters to the Ducketts from 1948 to 1976. Over the years, as the letters show, Wilson sent hundreds of watercolors to Duckett, who acted as his agent in arranging for sales or exhibits. Wilson's gratitude for Duckett's support is evident in the open and affectionate tone of the letters. Wilson confers extensively with Duckett in his search for suitable paper for his watercolors. He writes of his emotional and physical health (especially Folders 2, 6 and 8); his attempts to get his work exhibited and sold; his artistic output; his travels; his teaching load at WKU, and later his retirement in Hazel. He also sends news of Duckett's parents (who lived in Bowling Green), and of former students; reminisces about his early life and influences; and reflects on his religious beliefs, his church, and his difficulties with "modern" Christianity. Of particular interest are his lengthy thoughts about Frederic Whitaker's criticism of his work (Folder 7); and his tepid reaction to former student Joe Dudley Downing's embrace of modern art (Folder 8).

Box 5, Folder 9 contains two letters to Duckett from other writers; one is from former WKU president Dero Downing after he attended Ivan Wilson's funeral. Folder 10 contains Ivan and Emma Wilson's letters written between 1959 and 1973 to John Warren Oakes, an artist and 1964 WKU graduate. Included is a letter to Oakes's parents praising his talent. Both Wilsons write of their health and the stress of moving from their long-time home in Bowling Green back to Hazel. Also included is a copy of a letter of thanks from the Wilsons to a WKU committee following the dedication of the Ivan Wilson Center for Fine Arts in 1973, a ceremony that the Wilsons were unable to attend. Lastly, Folder 11 contains a 1968 program for a festival sponsored by Wilson's church, the Worldwide Church of God, which he began attending a few years after his retirement.

SHELF LIST

BOX 1	Ivan Wilson – Correspondence, writings	1918-1971	174 items
Folder 1	Inventory, biographical sketches, clippings		16 items
Folder 2	Diary kept by Ivan Wilson while at Camp Zachary Taylor (typescript)	1918-1919	2 items
Folder 3	Paper, "Is Art Justified in the Curriculum?"	1931	1 item
Folder 4	Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Wilson	1934-1971, n.d.	43 items

Folder 5	Letters to Henry Hardin Cherry and Finley Grise, and supporting material re: Art Department and art curriculum at Western Kentucky State Teachers College	1934, 1946	5 items
Folder 6	Journal of European trip and pencil sketches	1935	2 items
Folder 7	Diary	1946	1 item
Folder 8	Short stories and written sketches	1946-1965, n.d.	41 items
Folder 9	Miscellaneous correspondence	1948-1970, n.d.	8 items
Folder 10	Letters from Ford Motor Company: re paintings for use in article about Bowling Green; pencil sketch	1951	7 items
Folder 11	Letters to Hattie Strange Clagett (Mrs. John H.) and Marjorie Clagett	1951-1952	12 items
Folder 12	Draft letters to Frederic Whitaker, with autobiographical details	1953-1955	13 items
Folder 13	Letters, including drafts, regarding Ralph Crosthwaite	1953, 1957	4 items
Folder 14	Religious-themed writings	1964, 1965, n.d.	16 items
Folder 15	Taped letter from Edison H. Thomas	n.d.	1 item
Folder 16	Journal of New Orleans trip; restaurant menu	[1949]	2 items
BOX 2	Ivan Wilson – Drawings and sketches of Western Kentucky University scenes, etc.	n.d.	238 items
Folder 1	Watercolor – workmen on Field House (Margie Helm Library, WKU)	n.d.	1 item
Folder 2	Pen and ink drawings	n.d.	3 items
Folder 3	Pencil sketches of Henry Hardin Cherry	n.d.	3 items

Folder 4	Pencil sketch – Steps and walk, Van Meter Hall; Rural Demonstration School (WKU)	n.d.	2 items
Folder 5	Pencil sketch – Rear of Potter Hall (WKU)	n.d.	1 item
Folder 6	Pencil sketch – Heating plant (WKU)	n.d.	1 item
Folder 7	Pencil sketches – Colonnade (WKU)	n.d.	4 items
Folder 8	Pencil sketches – Barns, sheds	n.d.	7 items
Folder 9	Pencil sketches – Houses	n.d.	20 items
Folder 10	Pencil sketches – Trees, landscapes	n.d.	8 items
Folder 11	Pencil sketches – Wall, walks, trees	n.d.	3 items
Folder 12	Pencil sketches – Wagons and carts	n.d.	4 items
Folder 13	Pencil sketch – Man in chair	n.d.	2 items
Folder 14	Pencil sketches – Trains, railroad cars	n.d.	3 items
Folder 15	Pencil sketch – Tree and figure	n.d.	1 item
Folder 16	Pencil sketches – Log house	n.d.	3 items
Folder 17	Pencil sketches – Log structures	n.d.	2 items
Folder 18	Pencil sketch – Car on street	n.d.	1 item
Folder 19	Pencil sketches – Water jugs	n.d.	3 items
Folder 20	Pencil sketch – Bridge at Drakes Creek	n.d.	1 item
Folder 21	Cartoons (many featuring John H. Clagett)	[1927]	64 items
Folder 22	Pencil sketches – Horse, cart	n.d.	2 items
Folder 23	Pencil sketches – Vehicles, animals, etc.	n.d.	77 items
Folder 24	Pencil sketches – Studies in shading	n.d.	22 items

BOX 3	Ivan Wilson – Exhibitions	1940-1962	143 items
Folder 1	Western Kentucky State Teachers College – Clippings and guest register	1940-1954	9 items
Folder 2	Professional Art Club, Knoxville, Tennessee Clippings and correspondence	1941-1943	3 items
Folder 3	Illinois Art Gallery, Harrisburg, Illinois – Clipping	1941	1 item
Folder 4	Purdue University – Clippings	1941	1 item
Folder 5	Glasgow High School, Glasgow, Kentucky – Clipping	1942	1 item
Folder 6	East Texas State Teachers College – Clipping	1942	1 item
Folder 7	George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee – Correspondence	1942	4 items
Folder 8	Evansville Public Museum, Evansville, Indiana – Correspondence, clippings	1944-1945	6 items
Folder 9	Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri – Program, clippings; St. Louis Public Library – Correspondence	1944-1945	6 items
Folder 10	Virginia Intermont College – Correspondence, program	1946-1948	3 items
Folder 11	Covington Art Club, Covington, Kentucky – Correspondence, clipping	1953	2 items
Folder 12	Crit Club, Louisville, Kentucky – Correspondence, clippings	1953-1954	9 items
Folder 13	George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee – Correspondence, clippings	1954	8 items
Folder 14	Kentucky Historical Society – Correspondence, clipping	1954	3 items
Folder 15	Studio Guild (multiple locations) – Correspondence, clippings	1954-1955	9 items

Folder 16	University of Kentucky – Correspondence, clippings	1954-1955, 1962	5 items
Folder 17	Ogunquit Art Center, Ogunquit, Maine – Clipping	1955	1 item
Folder 18	Studio Guild (multiple locations) – Correspondence, clippings	1955	16 items
Folder 19	Studio Guild (multiple locations) – Correspondence, clippings	1956	13 items
Folder 20	Studio Guild (multiple locations) – Correspondence, clippings	1957	8 items
Folder 21	Storer Gallery, Central City, Kentucky – Clippings, correspondence, program	1961	13 items
Folder 22	Galerie Raymond Duncan, Paris, France – Clippings, reviews, photographs, announcements	1961-1962	17 items
Folder 23	University of Kentucky Northwest Center, Henderson, Kentucky – Clippings, program	1962	3 items
Folder 24	Knoxville Art Center, Knoxville, Tennessee – Clipping	n.d.	1 item
BOX 4	Ivan Wilson – Allbritten family; Miscellaneous; Other Artists	1943-1978	128 items
Folder 1	Photographs – Ivan Wilson and friends	n.d.	4 items
Folder 2	Allbritten family – Photograph, notes	1947, n.d.	2 items
Folder 3	Handwritten calling cards	n.d.	17 items
Folder 4	Record of tax deductions	Jan.-Mar. 1964	1 item
Folder 5	List of paintings, buyers and prices	1955, 1977-1978	2 items
Folder 6	<i>Daily News</i> clipping (decoupage)	Sept. 17, 1969	1 item

Folder 7	Joe Dudley Downing – Photographs and exhibit program	1961, 1964	2 items
Folder 8	Mary Ed Mecoy Hall Gallery (Murray, KY) – Clippings and exhibition program	1949-1950	4 items
Folder 9	Clippings regarding Ellis Wilson	1950-1952	3 items
Folder 10	Obituary of Samuel E. Ragland; poem by Ragland	1943; 1954	2 items
Folder 11	Clippings relating to various artists	1943-1954, n.d.	13 items
Folder 12	Photographs of locomotives	n.d.	4 items
Folder 13	Clippings and photographs relating to snakes in Kentucky	1955,1973, n.d.	73 items
BOX 5	Ivan Wilson – Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Austin Duckett & John Warren Oakes	1943-2003	146 items
Folder 1	Letter to Edward Austin Duckett; clippings about Edward Austin Duckett and Blanche Duckett	1943; 1965-2003	6 items
Folder 2	Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Austin Duckett	1948-1949	27 items
Folder 3	Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Austin Duckett	1950	11 items
Folder 4	Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Austin Duckett	1951	12 items
Folder 5	Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Austin Duckett	1952	12 items
Folder 6	Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Austin Duckett	1953	17 items
Folder 7	Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Austin Duckett	1954-1959	10 items
Folder 8	Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Austin Duckett	1960-1976	35 items
Folder 9	Letters to Edward Austin Duckett from others	1952-1981	3 items
Folder 10	Letters to John Warren Oakes	1959-1973	12 items

Folder 11	Worldwide Church of God festival program with Wilson's notes	1968	1 item
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BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS 356	WILSON, Ivan, 1889-1981	1918-2003
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Correspondence, photographs, sketches and drawings, writings, journals and clippings of or relating to Ivan Wilson, an artist and faculty member in the Art Department at Western Kentucky University from 1920 to 1958. Includes some materials related to other artists.

5 boxes. 88 folders. 829 items. Originals, photocopies, typescripts, photographs, cassette tape. 1981.91.1; 1986.129.1; 2010.39.1; 2010.142.2

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