

Collection #  
SC 0560

**JOHN ZWARA  
COLLECTION, 1934–2005**

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Processed by

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Indiana Historical Society  
450 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

[www.indianahistory.org](http://www.indianahistory.org)

## **COLLECTION INFORMATION**

VOLUME OF  
COLLECTION: 1 manuscript folder  
2 framed watercolor landscape paintings

COLLECTION  
DATES: 1934–2005

PROVENANCE: Estate of Don and Jo Hosmer, West Lafayette, Ind., 2014;  
John K. Goodwin, Jr., Rector, Pa., 2014

RESTRICTIONS: Absolutely no photocopying of the watercolor paintings is  
permitted.

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ALTERNATE  
FORMATS:

RELATED  
HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION  
NUMBER: 2014.0078, 2014.0257

NOTES:

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Hungarian immigrant, John Zwara was a prolific and talented artist who painted mostly landscapes in watercolors. He immigrated to the United States in the early 1900s and wandered for years before settling in Indianapolis in the 1930s. While living here Zwara slept in the streets and subsisted on money he earned by selling his paintings. Recognizing his artistic talent and his need for psychiatric help, local businessman Alexander Vonnegut befriended him and in 1938 brought him to Central State Hospital where he was admitted and diagnosed as schizophrenic. He stayed at the hospital only six months and returned to his life on the streets.

Zwara was never able to give a coherent account of his life but researchers have discovered some facts. He was born Jan Zwara in Hungary and attended secondary grammar school in Trstenan from 1891 to 1894. By 1900 he studied for one year in the Academy of Fine Art in Prague before immigrating to the United States. In searching the U.S. Census records the processor confirmed some of his whereabouts. An unmarried John Zwara first appeared in the 1910 Census. He and his brother Samuel boarded in the Jenitska family home in Cleveland, Ohio. He worked in a frame shop in that city and listed his age as 25; he stated that he had immigrated in 1904.

He filled out U.S. Naturalization Records on January 18, 1916 in Los Angeles, California with the following information; he listed his birth as December 27, 1884 in Turdosin, Hungary and he had arrived in New York on December 15, 1906. By 1919 Zwara was found in the California Railroad Employment Records working as a painter for the Northwestern Pacific Railroad.

Moving on from there in 1922 he showed up in the Salt Lake City Directory. Next he moved on to Omaha, Nebraska and the 1930 Census shows him as a roomer listing his profession as a "Landscape Artist." This was confirmed in the Omaha City Directory of 1931 where he was rooming at 618 N. 16<sup>th</sup> and his profession again was "Artist."

In Indianapolis in 1942 his draft registration shows he lived at 126 S. Delaware Street and worked at the Goldstein Company. He listed his birth date as December 27, 1880. By 1949 he was in the Indianapolis City Directory under "Artists" at 143 East Ohio Street. At some point he was taken in by the Little Sisters of the Poor where he lived until his death on May 24, 1951. He is buried in the Holy Cross and Saint Joseph Cemetery in Indianapolis.

Sources:

Materials in the collection

Ancestry.com

Perry, Rachel. 2005. John Zwara The Wandering Artist. *Traces*, Vol. 17, No. 3:" pg. 4.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The collection contains two watercolor landscape paintings signed and dated by the artist John Zwara, and one folder of manuscript materials about the artist.

The earlier painting, signed and dated 1934, shows a snowy night view from the south porch of the World War Memorial showing the Second Presbyterian Church roof, buildings along Pennsylvania Street, and University Park. It was donated by John K. Goodwin, Jr.

The other donors, Don and Jo Hosmer had just moved to Indianapolis in the fall of 1947. While looking for items to decorate their new apartment the couple purchased a watercolor painting either at Lyman Brothers or H.L. Lieber in downtown Indianapolis (They forgot which one). The painting was signed "Zwara 1948." The artist's identity remained a mystery until they saw an article in the *Indianapolis News* on September 10, 1987 on John Zwara and the announcement of an exhibit of his works at the Brown County Art Gallery. The couple drove to Nashville the next day with the painting to have it authenticated at the gallery. Their painting was authenticated and they were asked to include it in the exhibit.

The manuscript materials from the Hosmers consist of hand-written note cards that appear to have been prepared for a talk discussing the painting and how the couple acquired it, along with a brief story on the artist. There are also several printed items and clippings collected by them on exhibits of Zwara's work and life story.

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### CONTENTS

### CONTAINER

[Handwritten note cards for speech given by donor  
discussing the painting and the artist]

Folder 1

“The World of John Zwara”  
[Brown County Art Gallery exhibit brochure, 1987]

Folder 1

“Exhibit to Examine the Worlds of John Zwara”  
in Snakeroot Extract, No. 26, (Autumn 1993)

Folder 1

“Museum Supporters Donate Artifacts”  
in Expectations/May-June/2004  
[article on another Zwara painting that was donated to  
the Indiana State Museum]

Folder 1

Newspaper Clippings, 1987–2005

Folder 1

“John Zwara The Wandering Artist” pg. 4,  
by Rachel Berrenson Perry,  
*Traces*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2005

Folder 1

**John Zwara**  
**American (Indiana), 1880–1951**  
***[Winter Night View Along Pennsylvania Street] 1934***  
**Watercolor**  
**9 x 12 inches**  
**Gift of John K. Goodwin, Jr.**  
**2014.0257**

3rd Floor:  
Flat File 4-a

[Watercolor painting, signed and dated "Zwara 1934"]

Library Reading Room

**John Zwara**

**American (Indiana), 1880–1951**

***Landscape Along Wooded River, 1948***

**Watercolor**

**14 ½ x 17 inches**

**Gift of the Don and Jo Hosmer Estate**

**2014.0078**

[Watercolor painting, signed and dated "Zwara 1948"]

## CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog:  
<http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, SC 0560).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.