SCAMeL Speedy Startup 2025 Report

Oral History Digitization

Kelly Caldwell, Archivist
Moody Medical Library
Truman G. Blocker, Jr. History of Medicine Collections (Blocker Collections)
University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB)

The South Central Academic Medical Libraries Consortium (SCAMeL) graciously awarded the Moody Medical Library at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston funding to digitize cassette tapes of recorded UTMB histories held in the Truman G. Blocker, Jr. History of Medicine Collections.

Digitization

Before scheduling the first drop-off of tapes with the UTMB Classroom Services Department, we created a spreadsheet to keep track of each tape's movement between the Blocker Collections and Classroom Services. The first group of tapes was delivered in late May 2025. After the first tape was reformatted, the audio was sent to us for quality control purposes. The 111 tapes selected for this project were reformatted and delivered as WAV files over six months in four batches. The digitization of 111 cassette tapes resulted in 59 audio files, over 70 hours of audio, and interviews with 43 individuals.

Interviewees include:

- J. Peyton Barnes, MD (1903-1987), 1928 School of Medicine graduate and, in 1931, John Sealy Hospital's first resident
- Edward Brandt, Jr, MD, PhD (1933-2007), in 1970 named the first Dean of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, appointed by President Ronald Reagan as United States Assistant Secretary for Health from 1981 to 1984
- Captain Grace Decker (1903-2008), 1929 School of Nursing graduate, led Army Nurse Corps Officers in the 127th General Hospital during WWII
- Thomas James, MD (1925-2010), a world-renowned research cardiologist, served as UTMB's third president from 1987 to 1997
- James Jannasch (1922-2014), first director of the Personnel Office from 1954-1987
- Camille King (1929-2018), Associate Registrar for 33 years, President of the Secretary's Club

Metadata and Uploading to UTMB Health SHARED

While awaiting the delivery of the audio files, we began looking through our biographical files and other collections in the University Archives to gather metadata on each individual. We discovered that several of the interviews had partial transcripts or summaries that could also be digitized. These documents helped to enhance the metadata without having to listen to the entirety of the interviews for that information.

In two months, all 59 audio files were uploaded to UTMB Health SHARED with only two of the files having irreparable sound quality issues. Once the audio files were uploaded, we began to scan and upload the corresponding transcripts/summaries. We also added the signed interview agreements. To date, twelve documents have been uploaded with their respective interviews.

The current UTMB Oral Histories can be found here.

Next Steps

The Oral History collection consists of 230 cassette tapes, and we have already made arrangements with the Classroom Services Department to continue with the reformatting of the remaining 119 tapes. We are continuing to scan and upload transcripts/summaries. Additionally, we are investigating transcription services to create full transcriptions to accompany the audio files.

Thanks to SCAMeL, this Speedy Startup Award has enabled the Blocker Collections to begin a project that will result in a digital resource for those interested in researching the history of UTMB and the history of medical education in Texas.