Texas Medical Center Historical Audiovisual Resources Digitization

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Why did you want to do the project?

By their very nature, audiovisual resources are at a high risk for deterioration. At the same time, these can be some of the most compelling items in archives, and that's certainly the case at the Texas Medical Center Library's McGovern Historical Center (MHC). Moreover, moving image and sound recordings offer a variety of potential uses and opportunities for outreach. As we work to promote the McGovern Historical Center within and beyond the Texas Medical Center (TMC), these items have excellent potential to demonstrate the value of archives (and libraries more broadly).

While we have a variety of audiovisual resources in need of preservation and access, 54 items were selected based on their centrality to the Texas Medical Center, Inc., and the TMC Library. Records from these institutions form the core of our collections. Consequently, we wanted to focus on recordings they created or ones that directly documented their histories. We chose educational programs, news stories, oral histories, lectures, and other recordings that offer unique historical perspectives on the people and institutions that make up the Texas Medical Center.

The size of the project also made it an excellent pilot for future digitization efforts. For one thing, it provided us with an opportunity to compare and test out digitization vendors. It also allowed us to experiment with different descriptive workflows and means of creating access. Overall, it was small enough to manage efficiently, while also allowing for flexibility and creativity; but large enough to make meaningful progress in our quest to preserve and create access to audiovisual resources.

What did you do?

We selected 54 audiovisual assets—films, sound recordings, videotapes in a variety of formats—for digitization, item-level description, and publication online. These items had already been assessed for our Audiovisual Inventory and most had previously been identified as "recommended" for digitization.

We contacted three vendors offering audiovisual digitization services to request proposals. Having these proposals in hand will, in turn, help us craft future projects. We selected Scene Savers, which is based in Covington, Kentucky, to carry out the digitization.

We shipped the assets to Scene Savers via FedEx. Scene Savers created both preservation and access files, as well as checksums, for the newly digitized resources. These were delivered back to us on an external hard drive (we opted to provide our own drive—part of the reason we came in under budget). While the quality of original recordings varied, all 54 items were successfully converted to digital formats. The initial assessment for our inventory facilitated our success in identifying suitable candidates for digitization.

Upon receipt of the digital files, the first order of business was to transfer them to our Digital Collections Drive. From there, we did a basic quality control check—verified we had the right number of files, the right file names, and the full complement of access and preservation files as well as the checksums. The

next step was to spot-check segments from the beginning, middle, and end of each recording to ensure that each video or audio file played correctly and that nothing was missing. In the process, we discovered a few minor discrepancies and worked with the vendor to get these corrected.

Description was the most time- and labor-intensive part of the process on the MHC's side of things. Prior to digitization, we had already updated the archival finding aids with any information available on item labels. However, finally being able to view and/or listen to the recordings offered much more detail to work with. Primarily, this involved applying additional Subject Headings or Name Authorities to the records and creating a detailed Scope and Contents / Description note for each recording. Taking this project as an opportunity to test new ideas and workflows, we experimented with recording timestamps and noting the various segments within a given recording to further enhance access. For example, one ¾" U- Matic tape from the TMC Library Records (IC 001) actually contained clips from six separate television news segments about the Library. We noted the time at which each segment began, summarized its content, and named speakers where possible. This will offer much more granular access than the pre-existing title, "Channel 10 Midday Stories: Jones Library Features, Rare Book Collection."

The audiovisual resources and their newly enhanced descriptions were made available using the McGovern Historical Center's existing infrastructure. The Subject Headings, Name Authorities, and Scope and Contents / Description notes were added to finding aids available on our Access to Memory (AToM) archives management site (https://archives.library.tmc.edu/). A note was added to the Processing Information for each item: "Digitization supported by South Central Academic Medical Libraries Consortium (SCAMeL) Speedy Startup funds, 2022." Links from the individual records on the collections site take users to the MHC's Amazon Web Services S3 cloud storage, where the publicly available access files are hosted.

As of March 30, 2023, fifty-one items are described and available online. During quality control, three recordings were recognized as having potential privacy or permissions issues and were kept offline, pending the resolution of those concerns.

The final stage of the project was outreach and promotion.

- In October, we shared a post announcing the project on the MHC's blog, "The Black Bag" (https://library.tmc.edu/mcgovern/2022/10/18/thanks-to-scamel-tmc-librarys-a-v-history-is-getting-new-life/).
- In February, we shared a follow-up piece touting the newly available materials (https://library.tmc.edu/mcgovern/2023/02/22/tmc-a-v-resources-go-online/).
- These announcements were also shared on the MHC's Twitter (twitter.com/McGovernHRC) and Facebook (facebook.com/mcgovernHRC) accounts.

Beyond the MHC's existing channels, we submitted articles about the project in the professional newsletters of the Society of Southwest Archivists and the South Central Chapter of the Medical Library Association (https://app.box.com/v/SCC-Connections-v33n1). We will also be presenting on the project at the 2023 Annual Meeting of Librarians, Archivists, and Museum Professionals in the History of the Health Sciences.

We've also begun identifying potential stakeholders and contacting them to let them know about these newly available resources. For example, we reached out to the Archivist at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, where many of the videos were recorded.

Who was involved?

Sandra Yates, Head of the McGovern Historical Center, and Matthew Richardson, Archivist and Special Collections Librarian, collaborated on planning the project. Katie Prentice, Director of the TMC Library, supported the effort. Once things were underway, Matthew managed the logistics, digital preservation, and access and description workflows.

The MHC sought proposals from three different digitization vendors, and selected Scene Savers, based in Covington, KY, to carry out the digitization. At one point, we hoped to have a volunteer assist with the description of newly digitized resources, and we created project training documentation to facilitate this work. However, in the end she was unable to keep up with the commitment of time.

Was the budget accurate?

The budget was reasonably accurate. Following the planned digitization of fifty-two items, we found ourselves with a surplus of just over $800. This was in part because the four films we initially selected turned out to be shorter than we had estimated. Based on this, we requested an extension from SCAMeL to send two additional recordings to our vendor. With the addition of these films, as of this writing, the project stood about $44 under budget.

Was the time sufficient to carry out the plan?

The time was sufficient for the project—even with the addition of two more films, we were able to wrap everything up before the original deadline.

The creation of detailed metadata for the audiovisual assets took somewhat longer than expected, but was still complete well within the allotted project time. Originally, we planned to spend the final four months promoting the materials and completing the report to SCAMeL. Instead, we had approximately two months for these elements of the plan.

Were expected outcomes met?

To the extent that they can be measured in our current timeline, the expected outcomes of the project have been met:

- All of the selected A/V assets have been converted to digital formats and will be preserved.
- 51 of the 54 items have been posted online with enhanced descriptions for free public access.

The addition of these newly digitized resources resulted in a nearly 30% increase in moving image and sound recordings available via the MHC's collections site.

Beyond the technical goals of digitization and preservation, this project aimed to make these resources available for use. They are now available, but it will take time before we learn more about how they are eventually used. The project's goal of leveraging these resources to demonstrate the value of medical libraries and archives will require ongoing outreach and assessment.

What worked well?

The project's design of using SCAMeL funds to outsource digitization to a vendor while applying MHC staff time to the creation of original description served our purposes well.

Since we primarily used SCAMeL funds to outsource digitization services, this vital part of the project was actually the quickest and easiest from the MHC's perspective. The MHC currently lacks the ability to digitize most of the formats from this project in-house. Moreover, the digitization of at-risk media is vital and time-sensitive. By applying SCAMeL funds to digitization, the MHC was able to accomplish a goal beyond its usual operating capabilities. And, fortunately, the vendor was easy to deal with, timely, and performed excellent work.

Creating detailed descriptions did require a large time commitment from MHC staff. However, unlike the digitization of 16mm films or U-Matic tapes, we do have the ability and resources to do high-quality descriptive work in-house. Moreover, the creation of detailed description, while useful for access, was in some ways "value added" for this project; it could have been delayed if staff time had not been available.

As such, the allocation of resources for this project was highly effective. For a larger project, however, it may be worth requesting funds to hire additional temporary staff to assist in description.

Would you have done anything differently?

Some of the challenges we encountered could have been mitigated through a more careful audit of our existing inventories prior to sending materials to the vendor. Our inventory unquestionably helped select items based on provenance, date, format, and condition. However, we did run into an issue with a tape being numbered incorrectly, and also inadvertently sent a tape of one program that had already been digitized. In the future, I would recommend a more meticulous review of our physical assets, inventories, labels, and other documentation before sending things out to a vendor. More assessment on the front end would be much easier than trying to untangle issues after the fact.

Anything else you would like to share

The project was very successful and was generally very interesting to work on. It provided excellent project management experience, without being too large or intimidating. SCAMeL's approach to "Speedy Startup" funding is an excellent preparation for larger projects or funding applications.

We're excited to see the impact of sharing these resources online!