

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: R. Bruce Williams **COLLECTION:** 4700.2639

IDENTIFICATION: Board-certified doctor of clinical and anatomic pathology; past president and speaker of Louisiana State Medical Society

INTERVIEWER: Trenton James

SERIES: Louisiana State Medical Society

INTERVIEW DATE: January 21, 2016

FOCUS DATES: 1970s-2016

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4596

Introduction; Robert Bruce Williams was born March 5, 1950 in Kansas City, Missouri; mostly grew up in North Kansas City; explanation of Kansas City geography; father Ralph Edwards Williams was from Lenoir City, TN, where his family owned a mill; sister is a retired psychiatrist who now lives in California; names his elementary and junior high and high schools; participated in sports and was on the debate team; debated other teams around city and state; benefits of debate team: "I think of the things that helped me later on in life was you learned to think on your feet, you learned to think logically, you learned to make a cogent argument to folks, to organize your thoughts before you speak and to have references and have good data for the background."; attended Vanderbilt University, where he majored in chemistry; older sister had gone to Vanderbilt; Williams was the fifth best high school student in a class of 550; his schooling was calm before the uproar of the 1960s; describes sister's medical school education; She transferred to Johns Hopkins, so they didn't overlap at Vanderbilt; got interested in radio, was a news and sports reporter at Vanderbilt radio station; describes his dorm neighbors; between high school and college, he worked at Phillips Petroleum in the refinery; during college, decided to stay on campus and take more classes during summer; his second year in school, he was a disc jockey at the college radio station; working on radio in Nashville gave him access to lots of musicians and recording studios; talks about a friend who wanted to make it big on radio; met country singers, including Dolly Parton; was also involved with Baptist Student Union; "I was actually Presbyterian. But the Baptists were the only ones on campus."; getting hired by radio station WLS in Nashville; man who hired him died of a heart attack before Williams' start date, job opportunity disappeared; got job removing kidneys from mice; started considering medical school; encouraged to consider going to medical school; taking more science classes in summer after his second year; by the end of that summer, he decided to go to medical school; changed major from chemistry to molecular biology; studying under molecular biologist Gisela

Mosig; only about eight students were in molecular biology; Mosig had her students over to her house weekly to discuss new findings in genetics, then a subject in its infancy; switching from a station that was broadcast through electrical outlet wires to being a proper on-air station; religious remnants of Vanderbilt as a Methodist university; planning for a new campus radio station; bringing Krispy Kreme donuts to Baptist Student Union get togethers; met his wife Susan Vanhook at Baptist Student Union breakfast; describes first date; wife studied experimental psychology, experimented on cats; on dates, she'd sometimes come along and help him take kidneys out of rats for the research he was doing; oversleeping the morning he took the Medical College Aptitude Test; names medical schools where he applied; delay in his applications getting sent out; meeting an influential dean at Vanderbilt Medical School who helped him get in; attending medical school at Vanderbilt; describes the place he lived his first year in medical school; got married during his second year in medical school; job in pathology between his second and third years; names some of the leaders in pathology at the time; Susan was getting a PhD in experimental psychology at Vanderbilt; then Susan decided to go to medical school, got accepted at LSU in Shreveport; Susan was from Shreveport, she and Williams lived with her parents, Robert and Pattie Vanhook, for a while; choosing pathology, specializing in hematopathology; mother-in-law Pattie was a physician and president of Shreveport Medical Society; she got Williams involved in state and local medical societies; more about the Vanhooks' background; Pattie Vanhook's rise to state medical society presidency; Williams' participation in Shreveport Medical Society, College of American Pathologists and Louisiana State Medical Society; became interested in being speaker of the house of delegates because it reminded him of his debate background; took home lessons in parliamentary procedure from the American Institute of Parliamentarians; running for vice speaker; would fly or drive down to New Orleans with Pattie for meetings of the state medical society; usually they'd stay over at the Pontchartrain Hotel; moving up to speaker of the house of delegates; difference between roles of vice speaker and speaker; disagreement with Stormy Johnson over election process for alternate delegates; speaker might have had more power than president; in total, spent 12 years on board; controversy over moving the state medical society domicile from New Orleans to Baton Rouge; representing Louisiana at an AMA meeting in Washington about Hillary Clinton's effort to nationalize healthcare; speaking to organizations around the state about healthcare; explains his work with College of American Pathologists (CAP) inspecting hospitals for accreditation; ultimately chose his CAP work over being a delegate to the AMA, as time constraints did not allow for both; became head of accreditation department for four years, after which he stepped down due to term limits; then served on the CAP board for six years; at time of interview, is president-elect of CAP; describes his schedule of committee meetings; travel involved with his CAP positions; travel will increase when he takes over presidency; his wife Susan became a rheumatologist; when their youngest son was diagnosed with dyslexia, the Caddo Parish head of special education advised them to leave town so he could go to a decent school; in 2002, Susan gave up her job and took their son to live in Dallas so he could attend the Shelton School, which specialized in dyslexia; in a couple of years, the school brought him from second grade up to twelfth grade levels of reading and math; Susan's medical school education; details of his children and grandchildren; Susan found an excellent job in North Carolina; careers and whereabouts of their three children; Williams served as president of LSMS from 1996-1997; Williams went back and forth between Louisiana and North Carolina, where his wife was working; names the pathology groups in town when he started practice; evolution of pathology practices in Shreveport; starting helping out a friend's understaffed practice in Monroe; also

joined with groups in Alexandria, Lake Charles Lafayette and other cities around the state; explains how pathologists process samples; economy of scale when pathologists group together; shortage of histology technicians in Louisiana; logistics of reading stains in facilities around the state; now all the pathologists in his group have specialties; efforts to get slides to the right specialist; collaboration around the state: "So we're able to bring really first-class pathology to Louisiana by having a large group."; Pattie Vanhook's plan to be a radiologist thwarted by opinion in Caddo Parish that women don't do radiology; she went into general practice and worked in the state health department instead; in that position, she was in charge of signing birth certificates, overseeing mosquito control and rabid dogs; then Pattie Vanhook worked as the company doctor for General Electric; Vanhook's background and education; Vanhook was first woman president of state medical society; description of Vanhook's personality; after presidency, Vanhook served as part of the AMA delegation; Vanhook had a massive stroke at an AMA meeting and died; his experiences testifying at state legislature and interest in politics; mentions his close friends in politics.

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OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence

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