Interview with Dennis Casebier
Goffs, California
3/18/06

How he got interested in the Mojave, joined the Marines, boot camp in 1953, no prior involvement with Route 66 – sent to communications and electronics school in San Diego, then posted at Twentynine Palms until 1956 – where he became hooked on the desert/infected by the homesteader spirit – national parks used to be less busy – Marines got a lot of time off so they wandered the desert

Two roads led from Twentynine Palms to 66 – main road went to Amboy where they would go for coffee – Amboy busier then, no bars, but three cafés and three big service stations.

Hitchhiked everywhere – once picked up by a drunk man in a new Ford – Dennis drove to Albuquerque, the driver wouldn't wake up, put the keys in the driver's lap and kept on – what stood out about trips back then were the signs and constantly having to pass trucks – Route 66 was almost all two-lane and it was a steady flow of traffic then but not busy – back then if there was a problem, he felt he would be taken advantage of – put in 20 years of driving before the Interstate went in – taken advantage of once: told they had to have chains to get through even though they didn't need them – the bad people weren't the permanent residents, but people who had come in to take advantage of travelers on 66

Accidents on 66: were passed one winter night by a little red car that Dennis said they would see later – they did, the driver had wrecked and died – Dennis and his wife found a hotel and stayed two nights for the weather to clear – hitchhiked once with three others who had just gotten out of the service and who went out of their way to get each other home – tried taking the bus back to Twentynine Palms once, got off in Albuquerque and hitchhiked the rest of the way – went back to Kansas, went to college, returned to Joshua Tree, but too many people so he went looking for somewhere else and found the Mojave Road – started working in Washington and went to the National Archives at night and started his research – microfilmed everything

Settled in Goffs after retiring in early 1990, bought the homestead he now owns, and started collecting oral history – Goffs Schoolhouse was a cantina for soldiers during World War II – Goffs also had the Wayside Inn which was moved to Essex – people that owned the school house made it a general store

6,000 volumes in the library – no index – have to talk to Dennis to find things – collection includes National Archives census materials – voter registration, newspapers, Germaine Moon collection – 5,000 maps plus Moon's collection has an additional one or two thousand – 50,000 photographs, including 1,500 photos from a lady from Mecca – photo collection is tied to the oral history collection – not everything is catalogued – one access computer – interviews are transcribed and bound

Interviews with Route 66 interest: the Lyons, father worked in a maintenance yard; Speith, with photo collection; Maggie McShan; Douglas McClanahan, sons owned a dairy; Jack Meechum Riddle; John Frederick Piper, from Chubbuck, with photo collection; Swain, ran the store in Goffs until Robert Ervin took over—most of these people are now dead.

Success with volunteers: they have to know how to do it – they haven't had a grant in 16 years – people out there that want to do something that matters – give credit to those that help, which he does through the newsletter, which is later bound, and through Wagon Master Awards – get rid of people that are not working out – make sure that people know that if they don't fit in one place, they can try another

DAVID DUNAWAY: I'd like to know how it was you came to be interested in the Mojave and your experiences growing up traveling Route 66.

DENNIS CASEBIER: Well, I'll tell you how I got interested in the Mojave Desert. When I was a very young man, I joined the Marine Corp and I was going to go to Korea to fight. And, when I was in boot camp, this would be in 1953, I had no prior involvement in Route 66. I didn't come out here on Route 66. I came out here on the train. When I was in boot camp, and the way I always say it, the North Koreans found out I was coming so they signed the Armistice. Which just makes sense. I volunteered to go to Korea anyway because we still had people there. Marine Corps didn't want me to do that. They sent me to the communications and electronics battalion school in San Diego.

I got schooled in telegraphy and radios and stuff. So when we got done, instead of sending me to Korea, they sent me to their new base at Twentynine Palms, and that would have been April of 1954. I did the rest of my enlistment there and got hooked on the desert. I stayed there until August of 1956. I really became hooked on the history of the desert. That's not Route 66 history and that's nowhere near here either: it's about 100 miles. The pioneer sprit was still there in Twentynine Palms—you know that's a homestead area.

It was populated by gas victims from World War I. They had to go somewhere out where it was dry. The story goes that there was a doctor in Pasadena that sent a lot of people out there. I got infected somewhat by that homesteader spirit, and then the mines. What is now Joshua Tree National Park was a national monument then and it was about the same amount of empty that the Mojave National Preserve is today—or was. So you weren't bothered too much with crowds.

I remember in those days if you were going to spend the night in Joshua Tree National Monument and you came to a campground and if there was anybody else there you went to a different campground until you found one where there was no one. We got a lot of time off because that was considered an isolated base, so if you behaved yourself you could get extra time off. So we just wandered all over the desert. We went down those mines on those rickety ladders.

We touched 66 pretty early on there because there were two roads that lead from the Marine base at Twentynine Palms to 66. The main road went to Amboy. You didn't have anything to do, so if you had a friend that had a car you put a little gas in it and you would drive all the way over to Amboy and get a cup of coffee. That was probably my first association with 66 and that would have been '54, '55, something like that.

DAVID DUNAWAY: What did Amboy look like at that time?

DENNIS CASEBIER: Well, it was a lot busier place than it is now. I'm not an expert on what all was there, but you had your choice of places. There were at least three major places, including Roy's Café—that's there now—and it was busy.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Do they have bars?

DENNIS CASEBIER: I don't remember them having a bar. I wasn't old enough to drink. We didn't drink all that much, we would get a pot of coffee and turn around and go back.

DAVID DUNAWAY: There were service stations?

DENNIS CASEBIER: There were at least three big ones, yeah. Those are all very well documented there. Across from Roy's and then west of Roy's, where that regeneration station is now, there was a big station. We didn't spend a lot of time there; I don't mean to say that, that was probably the first touch I had with it.

If you want me to talk about 66 then there were a couple of times in that two years that I went back to Kansas and I would hitchhike 66. Get somebody to take you to Amboy. That wasn't really a problem.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Did you get rides easy?

DENNIS CASEBIER: Yeah, and I did not hitchhike in uniform. I think you can kind of spot servicemen, but I didn't feel the need to get rides by traveling in uniform. I never traveled in uniform off base. So I would hitchhike to Oklahoma City, then north on 75. There's another place there where you can angle off 66 and go up towards Liberal, Kansas and then east into Witchita and that was before the Turnpike. I hitchhiked all over the United States.

DAVID DUNAWAY: How is 66 from a hitchhiker's perspective?

DENNIS CASEBIER: I remember one guy came along. He had a new Ford convertible and the top was down and he was drunk as a skunk, and he picked me up. The top was down and he was some kind of salesman and he had stuff sticking out everywhere. So much stuff he couldn't get put the top up! We drove a little ways up 66 and we could both see that he was in no condition to operate a vehicle and he pulled over to the side and said, "You have a driver's license?" I said, "Yeah." "Would you mind driving?" That's like sending a hungry dog to the store after a pound of raw hamburger.

I did and he just passed out. I drove all the way to Albuquerque in that thing. He was going on somewhere, I guess north or something, and we were driving through those mountains, freezing. It would probably put me in the hospital today. And I think he had been awake and we got something to eat around Holbrook and he passed out again.

We got to Albuquerque and I was going straight on 66 and he was going north and I tried to wake him up, but he wouldn't so I just put the keys in his lap and took off down the road. Hitchhiking was that kind of experience. It was really not that uncommon to get a long haul like that.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Was that your first time out in that part of the world or had you been there before?

DENNIS CASEBIER: It could well have been the first time.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Bring yourself back there with the guy passed out on the side of you in the beautiful new car, top down: what did it look like to you, making your way east?

DENNIS CASEBIER: I remember. You remember all the signs, all kinds of signs telling you something's ahead. The part that really stands out in my mind is the mechanical part of driving, where you were constantly coming up behind a truck and you have to wait to find a place to pass. We're talking all night long. There's a lot I didn't see. I wasn't especially enamored with it as I remember—I was enamored with the car, that was a fine car. It was light blue, so that was probably '54.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Was there a lot of traffic, two-lane most of the way?

DENNIS CASEBIER: Yup. Almost all two-lane. And you went through every little town along the way and you somehow understood that you had to be careful going through those little towns or you would end up with a ticket. I never have been a speeder. I just loved driving that car, but I remember going through all those little towns.

When you talk about history, numerically things are different. It seemed like a lot of traffic to me, but by today's standards I suppose it isn't. But it was, there was a steady flow of traffic. You're constantly coming up behind a truck. There's your opportunity to kill yourself, and you were aware of that.

The other thing that was on my mind in those early years – I don't know about this particular trip because it wasn't my car – but there was the feeling that if you had a problem, you were going to be taken advantage of. That was a strong feeling, that the people along the road did not have your best interest at heart. And there was even a feeling then that folks were there to take advantage of you. It's a thing I didn't like about 66.

My driving experience lasted about 20 years until the interstate went in. And that part got worse toward the end. The last ten years, especially across the California Desert here, there weren't many safe havens, and you learned that you couldn't let anybody under your hood. You had to watch your tires. I don't know where I picked all that up, but I'm sure it was true.

I remember one time I got taken advantage of on 66. This would have been early '60s. I had my wife with me, heading back east. We approached the Flagstaff area and it began to snow. I pulled into a service station, and they said we weren't getting ahead without chains. We didn't need chains. But here I am going down the road and didn't have much money anyway and they sold me chains.

I think as the romanticists look back over Route 66, they don't look at that. If a person was weak, they were in trouble on 66 in those days. A woman driving by herself, the guy lifts up the hood and sprays your generator, a little oil on it and it starts smoking, you're in for a new generator. Ice pick in the radiator hose.

The worst among these were—I'm talking about insights in recent years – it turns out were not the permanent residents. They were people that came out from the cities to make a buck. That got worse toward the end. A lot of these people make you

believe you have these movie stars going up and down Route 66 in Corvettes. Maybe so, but for the school teacher wanting to get back to her home in the Midwest, she's in trouble.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Was traffic steadily increasing until the time when the bypasses came? What was it like at that point, in the '60s, driving 66?

DENNIS CASEBIER: I've learned to kind of respond with my gut when someone asks me a question. I remember especially that stretch between Kingman and Seligman, because it was one of the later ones, they had a lot of blasting to do in those mountains. So here you'd come going east or west, and either in Kingman or Seilgman you were suddenly down to two lanes. It's heavy traffic. This problem of do I pass or not?

DAVID DUNAWAY: Did you see any accidents on 66?

DENNIS CASEBIER: Oh, yeah. One Christmas we were going back to Kansas. This would have been mid-'60s. We were out near Shamrock and by the time we got there – I was driving a '58 Pontiac – it was ice, but we kept going. Boy, you get that in your stomach. Here came this little sports car passing us, I turned to my wife and said, "We're going to see him down the road."

That's a thing I'll never say again. We got down the road a ways and there was this little sports car laying across the road and he was dead. So we limped into Shamrock and found a hotel. I said, "I'm not budging." We had to stay two nights. Once again, I was young and didn't have any money. Things like that prey on you.

Another thing that would prey on you on that highway would be your family. See, I'm a good driver. I still am. So I'm looking down the road, saying that I have plenty of room, but not everybody in the car thinks you do. So there's another source of stress. I did not have a sense of romance on 66. That particular trip that I described, I look back at that fondly. That '54 trip.

Another trip in '56. When I got out of the Marine Corps, I thought what am I going to do now? Well, your buddy takes you to Amboy, and you get out and stick your thumb up. We went over to Roy's, had a piece of pie and a cup of coffee, I said goodbye to my friend, and I haven't seen him since. As we parted company, I had to run across the road because there was a car coming and it stopped and picked me up and took me to Kingman.

I got to Kingman in the wee hours, it must have been 2 am or something. I stood there for quite awhile, and along came this car. It had three guys in it and they had all just gotten out of the service, all three of them. They didn't know each other, they were as much strangers as I was. One was a solider and two were sailors. So now there was going to be four of us. We're all ready to be home.

We all had lives to pick up. So, the three of us that didn't own the car paid the gas. We kept that car in motion, and we beat the Superchief to Kansas in that car. Not recklessly. That was a fun trip. I enjoyed that. There was some real camaraderie there. In fact, they went a hundred miles or so out of the way to drop me off at my front door in Topeka. We had already dropped one guy off. So by then there were three of us. One guy would sleep and we would stop to get something to eat once in a while.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Were there any hot spots on 66? I mean I imagine young men out of the service they aren't interested in only coffee and pie.

DENNIS CASEBIER: Well, see, you may have the wrong guy for that. I remember stopping for hamburger or something, but I don't believe anybody drank any alcoholic beverages. I was 22 by then, I could have. No, we didn't stop at any hot spot, we kept moving. My time on Route 66, if the road was clear, and the car was working right, you kept moving. You weren't going to slow down and dally because it was so much fun: you were trying to get from point A to point B. Even when I had a family and I traveled that road, there were times I drove longer than I should have.

I remember one time I drove all the way from Topeka to Grants, and by the time we got there I'm really tired. I found a place to pull off and I couldn't go to sleep, because every time I heard a truck it entered my mind that I was still driving and I had fallen asleep. So I had to drive the car to somewhere I couldn't hear before I could drift off any. I always had that kind of feeling, that this isn't a pleasure ride. It's time to get where I'm going and get out of the clutches of whatever might happen to you. Some of it was climactic, and some of it was the panhandle, too.

Other wrecks don't stand out in my mind, but you would pass them. I would never stop if there were authorities there.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Then you came back to the Mojave from Kansas.

DENNIS CASEBIER: There were a couple of things that happened to me then. I was in Topeka and I was supposed to come back to Twentynine Palms. I bought a bus ticket. I thought I'm getting too dignified for this. It just drove me crazy. I got off that bus in Albuquerque, threw my ticket away and hitchhiked the rest of the way. Every Marine family, even officers with families, would stop and pick up anyone who looked like a Marine in those days. I beat the bus—no question about it. So, I never tried that again. I hitchhiked all over the United States.

Then I went back to Kansas and went to college, studied science and engineering. All I got was a bachelor's degree, but back in those days it meant more. It was more. You could get a degree in science in those days and understand the scientific method. I'm not sure you could do that today. I'm revealing a bias here.

I wanted to go back to the desert. 1960 was a good year to graduate with a degree in science and engineering. So I applied at Holloman [in New Mexico], China Lake, and this Navy lab in Corona. They answered first so I took the job. I did 30 years there. That put me back in striking distance of the California desert which is where I really wanted to be. I'd have settled for New Mexico, I like New Mexico. It would have been new and different, but I liked it.

So, I resumed my desert ways and went back to Joshua Tree National Monument. It had changed in those 4 years. It had become inundated with people, foreigners, all kinds of people. So I didn't like it. I found the East Mojave, started scouting around the California Desert. I noticed this high country out here which said to me that it had to be like Joshua Tree was. It was, it's magical. It's being ruined now.

Right through the middle of it on the maps there was a desert two-tracker and it said Old Government Road on it. I thought what is a government road? That turned out to be a misnomer, but that's what we now call the Mojave Road.

I'm one of these people that has to be doing something. It's not enough to come out to the desert and drink beer and sit on a rock. I got interested in the history, early '60s, in kind of a serious way. I got interested in that old road. Well, at the same time the government was sending me to Washington about a third of my time. I discovered that the National Archives was open at night. In those days what was closest to me was UCR and you could park there and walk over to the library. I reviewed the literature of this country and I realized that nothing was written about that old wagon road, hardly. One guy had done a master's thesis on one of the army posts, but that's about it.

I thought, well, I could study that. The period I'm looking at is the period of the Indian Wars, that's federal records, so I worked in the National Archives for almost 30 years and really gleaned out everything I could find that had anything to do with this country, and in the very beginning made a very good decision. It was an easier decision to make then than now because they didn't have very good Xerox machines then, so when I would find things I wanted I had them microfilmed. So I ate beans out of a can and used my per diem to get this stuff copied. I have about 50 rolls, everything I could find in that time.

So, now the only contact with 66 in that period is that when we started coming out here, there was one of two ways to get here. You could go out through Cajon Pass and follow 66 out here and then go out into the desert. So I did that prior to 1972. I hated it when they put the Interstate in. I hate any kind of change. There was a continual contact with the Road. Became acquainted with the people out here.

DAVID DUNAWAY: At what point did you settle into Goffs?

DENNIS CASEBIER: I started writing about the Mojave Road. Oral history had no role in that because all those people were dead. I got into the business of tracking descendants to see if there were letters and diaries and photographs and I made a mistake at that time because there were a lot of old timers in the desert and I didn't talk to them at the time because I was studying a period where they didn't have first-hand knowledge. I would listen to them tell me about their old wagon road, and I didn't know what they were talking about. So I kind of dismissed the idea of oral history longer than I should have, until about 1980. What caused me to do that was I had exhausted that subject: I wrote monographs, about 10.

Now my question was, do I come forward in time or do I expand the geographical area? I made the decision to come forward in time and then you bump into the concept of, hey, some of these people are still alive that have first-hand knowledge. Some of these people have stories from their families.

So then I got into the business of recreation trails. We made a recreation trail out of the Mojave road and then on the 23rd of September, 1989, I'm eligible for retirement. Jo Anne and I said, ok, where are we going to go? There were two choices. One was go buy a nice house somewhere and study history and write about it. The other was pick a place that had a public interface. The concept at the time was if we do that we might be able to build a place that lasts.

When I was within two weeks of being eligible for retirement I got a letter from the people that own this property. In 1913, the guy who owned the homestead here donated an acre to the Goffs School District, but he put a clause in the deed of gift that said if there ever comes a time where you don't need it for school purposes you have to give it back. It got deeded back in to private ownership and it was part of a 115 acre piece of property. The person who bought never did anything with it. So people lived in the school house until 1954 and after that it was badly vandalized.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Now this is after Route 66 was bypassed?

DENNIS CASEBIER: Route 66 bypassed this place in the early '30s. It ghosted after that. The death knell for Goffs came in World War II. There were as many as 15,000 troops here then. The soldiers destroyed everything that no one was sitting on. They did not destroy the school house, it served as a cantina. That's how we got it on the National Register.

I did an oral history with a man who drove cabooses through here in World War II and he could remember when there was a sea of men between him and the school house, lines going around.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Have you ever done any interviews with anyone who actually remembered Route 66 passing through Goffs?

DENNIS CASEBIER: Yeah, I'd have to look. I've done interviews with people that ran the businesses in Goffs that had the cafes.

DAVID DUNAWAY: What did Goffs have in the days of 66?

DENNIS CASEBIER: They had the Wayside Inn. Later it wound up in Essex. The building did. When they removed the active highway they didn't need things like this. The buildings that served the highway in Goffs went all over: one went to Cadiz Summit. The Wayside Inn went across from where the Caltrans Yard is now. It was probably the biggest thing in Essex. It was here in Goffs, the Brooke family owned it. They also had a garage, grocery store, post office, the White Cottage Café. If you study the land patterns, you can see where these places were.

DAVID DUNAWAY: How about that general store? [meaning the present one south of the tracks]

DENNIS CASEBIER: It wasn't there in those days. It came from the California Division of Highways, the land did. We found a sign up in the attic of this building that says California Division of Highways Goffs. When the highway relocated – I have researched the chain of title – right after WWII that ended up in private hands. The people that ran things in the Goffs school house built that building over there and made a store out of it. They didn't own this [the schoolhouse]. It operated until three or four years ago. The guys are over working on it now.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Is that Bob Ervin?

DENNIS CASEBIER: Yeah.

DAVID DUNAWAY: He's back?

DENNIS CASEBIER: Yeah, I've seen him. He has legal possession of it. In a way it's a disappointment because – I hope he succeeds – but during his hiatus he missed a tremendous opportunity. Here a couple of years ago Santa Fe wanted to get out of the water business and everybody that had their water piped to their house had an opportunity to sign a piece of paper relieving Santa Fe any responsibility in exchange for a check for $40,000.

What most of us did was take that money and build a well. Robert was in arrears or something and I guess they canceled his contract. He's sitting over there with that tiny piece of property with gas tanks in the ground and no water. Which means it would cost him at least $40,000 to put a well over there.

I was headed home in my Jeep in 1982. I had about half a roll of film, and I looked over at this old derelict and I said to myself, never imagining that I would become connected with it, "Next time I come by it's going to be on the ground." So I got out of my jeep and walked around it and photographed it. It's really a distinctive structure. There isn't anything else like it, I bet there isn't along Route 66 either. It's an example of Mission-style architecture.

When I got home I heard some people had bought it, Jim and Bertha Wold, and they were going to save it. They did. They managed to get a contract for water with Santa Fe, and they ran a line over here. By the time we got it they had a phone line and electricity too. They stabilized it. They made a house out of it. When we restored it we had to undo everything they did, but they saved it.

So, two weeks before I was eligible for retirement, we got a letter from Jim and Bertha Wold, saying they had to leave and they offered us the right of first refusal on that property, right when Jo Anne and I were trying to decide what we wanted to do. We came out here and thought, "Oh my gosh, this is going to be a lot of work." Everyone out here wanted to buy it, so we paid them $100,000 for the whole 113 acres. From the very beginning our policy has been that we weren't going to borrow a nickel from anybody, so we managed to raise the money. The rest is history.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Maybe at this point we should turn towards the collections and the interviews you've done. Maybe you could start by giving me an overview of your collection. Let's move from your overall collection on the Mojave and then move from there into materials within that collection that would take up Route 66.

DENNIS CASEBIER: You've raised issues like that before. If this was an ordinary library, you might be able to respond to something like that. In the building we're sitting in there's 6,000 volumes. I could do what you're talking about, right? But when you get into basic research materials it's a horse of a different color.

Let me give you an example. We have many area newspapers on microfilm and copied things of interest on the Eastern Mojave. When you get into the period of time

when—you're saying Route 66, I would include National Trails Road—there will be a bunch of that stuff, but it's all mixed in with all the other stuff. So there isn't any way to answer your questions. Yeah, it's got some of that in it.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Well, let's start with an overview of the collection.

DENNIS CASEBIER: I have a written statement of the overview of the collection.

DAVID DUNAWAY: I'll take that from you, but could you just give us a very brief overview?

DENNIS CASEBIER: I don't know if I can or not. I'm not fussing with you—I'll try. When somebody comes here to do research, first thing I tell them is this place is a little like taking a drink out of a fire hydrant. If you're looking into railroad, you can't just go look under 'R.' It don't work that way. This is not a library.

If you want to look at the published books, what I would do is say, "Well, tell me what your problem is," and generally when they tell me, I'm going to say, "You need to go read these basic works and if you have any questions come back." Yes, we have them, but you can find them in your home town and you can find them on interlibrary loan.

I view the volumes here as a convenience for people when they are looking at the real stuff. There isn't hardly a book in here that somebody else doesn't have. There's almost a thousand oral histories that no one else has.

We have a 6,000 volume library. That's a component. We have a microfilm collection, and a lot of it you could get somewhere else. It would take you a while to find out how. National Archives micro-pubs: we have all the census records that have anything do to with anything near here. We have all the voter registration records, all the Needles newspapers. We collect Las Vegas, but not anything modern. Newspapers for San Bernadino, Los Angeles, Wilmington, early San Francisco, and on and on.

In the Germaine Moon collection alone, there is almost 500 reels of microfilm. None of them are in there. Germaine's stuff largely complemented what we have here, because it's largely county stuff. Even though I was living in the county, I didn't spend much time with county records, but Germaine did. She understood that, and that's why she wanted us to have it, I think. We each had huge collections, but they complemented each other.

I have a map collection. That was the stuff that needed the most work, so we threw some money at that. They have been re-hydrated, and flattened. We have a database now and there are 5,000 maps. Germaine Moon's collection has another one or two thousand and they are in the condition mine were in before we restored them.

In fact, a staffer for a political party called me and said you have five to ten minutes to tell me something you could spend five to ten thousand dollars on and my first thought was those maps, so we could re-hydrate them and flatten them out and get cabinets for them.

DAVID DUNAWAY: So they'll have a lot of material on Route 66, those county maps.

DENNIS CASEBIER: Yeah. There's other students on Route 66 that have probably dug more deeply into that than I have. But yeah, there are lots of maps that would show 66. There are some Auto Club maps that we don't have. We have most of them. Then you look over your shoulder there, there's a set of Touring Topics and Westways that goes back to 1910. Where are you going to find a set of those? Do you think there's a little Route 66 in there? This collection is a good collection. There aren't many sets of Westways and Touring Topics around.

I have had people drive all the way out here to look at certain issues of Westways and Touring Topics. The Auto Club library doesn't have what I have. There's a real concentration of stuff here. I know people that have 6,000 books, but these are focused. I don't know anybody that has a collection focused like this. There's a lot of maps that would relate to 66, I would not throw away anything that had to do with that.

DAVID DUNAWAY: So beyond maps, then photographs perhaps.

DENNIS CASEBIER: I tell folks that we have 50,000 photographs—I don't know, I haven't counted them lately. I made up that number. It's in that ballpark, and it needs work.

DAVID DUNAWAY: That covers the whole Mojave or just the eastern?

DENNIS CASEBIER: Let me explain the scope of our geographical interest I put together a slide show on our oral history work that I gave at the Disneyland hotel to a group of 400 people two weeks ago. I showed them the maps of our geographical interest, as a way to let them know if they were going to do oral history they need to know what they're doing it on. I showed the Mojave National Preserve as a primary focus, and then larger, south of Death Valley, then east of Barstow and north of Twentynine Palms, and west of the Colorado River. Except in northwestern Arizona. If I run into a treasure, I capture it.

One of the largest photograph collections I have has 1,500 photos and they were made by a lady who lived in Mecca, the north end of Salton Sea. There's only a handful of East Mojave pictures in it, but they're wonderful. There's a good picture of Amboy. I don't know how she got to Amboy, but there's a good picture of Amboy in there.

Where the richness of our photo collection came from – it's really tied to the oral histories. From the very beginning, I have been as aggressive to ferret out people's pictures as I have to ferret out them. I go after them with a vengeance. I wish I'd had high-resolution scanning equipment from the beginning, because we frequently don't get to keep the pictures. I have a Nikon with that 55mm micro-p lens. That's probably one of the best close-up copy lens made. I've always had the film processed at a laboratory, I don't give them to Thrifty Drugstore. We take these little snapshots and we can get a good 8X10. We have thousands of those.

When I interview somebody whose story is in and around 66, then I copy them all. If they took a trip to Yosemite Valley, I don't care about Yosemite Valley. On the other hand, in one collection there was this wonderful picture with a battleship in the

locks of the Panama Canal. The person who took the picture is on the bridge, looking down over the big guns. It turned out to be the *U.S.S. Arizona*. I copied that.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Maybe we could speak logistically for a minute. Supposing a researcher came to you and said, “Ok, I’m really interested in finding the pictures you have about Route 66 in your collection.” How would you be able to respond to that kind of request?

DENNIS CASEBIER: We’re working on the photo collection. My problem is, I’ve had two different people working on it. First off, it’s got to be somebody you really trust. I had one guy working on it, he worked on it for a couple years.

First, I need to tell you how they’re organized. They are not organized by Route 66. They are organized by the donor. So if I get a bunch of pictures from the Swain family, then that becomes the Swain collection. There’s an envelope that has the proof sheets and the negatives and whatever has been enlarged. I had enough people to do enlargements. I get the goodies enlarged. My eye sees this. What I’ve learned is that the calibration on my eye is one thing and the calibration on someone else’s is different. The other day I pulled one out of the bag that I wasn’t that impressed with and it turned out to be a beautiful picture.

What the first guy was doing was going through the envelopes and making a list of what’s in there. By and large our captioning material is filed with the pictures. Whenever we have enlargements made, the first thing we do is put the information on the back of them. A lot of our captioning material has not been processed and it’s embedded in the interviews, it is an integral part of the interviews. Some of that has been processed.

What you do is go in the interviews and you print that part that deals with caption material and put in the photo folder. Once you get a list of what’s in the envelopes, and you type it into the computer, you search and it kicks them out. Accessing a collection that large is an art-form to some extent. You have to know what you’re doing.

If somebody comes to me now and asks me what you did, here’s how it’s going to work. I don’t turn anybody loose with the photo collection. I sit them down and ask what they’re doing. Inexperienced researchers, they don’t want to start that way. They start with, do you mind if I back my truck up and you give me your Route 66 photographs. I couldn’t do that if I wanted to!

What’s Route 66 to you? What about Bonanza Spring? It’s just a couple miles out of Danby, up in the hills, a very important place. People squatted there for years. All that traffic went by on 66 and they didn’t even know they were up there. I’m the artisan. You have to come talk to me. I may conclude after talking to you that I don’t want to mess with it. That happens.

The kind of thing that turns me off is there’s all these environmental things going on. So you have this company that’s going to do this environmental impact report. There was a time that I contributed to those, but I don’t see them as making much of a meaningful contribution. I only have so much time.

So part of it is computerized and a bunch of it isn’t. The only way into it right now is through me.

DAVID DUNAWAY: You have these typed into the computer, you have lists of what's in each envelope.

DENNIS CASEBIER: Some of them.

DAVID DUNAWAY: I assume those would be searchable by locale and possibly with a keyword?

DENNIS CASEBIER: I have another computer that's used for access, and for me to keep track of where I stand on these things. I go to an interview, then there's a component in a database that keeps track of that interview. The first thing it tells you is how many tapes is it and who and where. Then you get to the status: has it been duplicated? We've gotten to the point that when we get home, I do that. The originals are in one building and the duplicates are in another. Then, has it been farmed out to anybody for transcription, and has it been transcribed? How many words is it? It can go up to 400,000 words. No index. It is a key word entry. Route 66 is one of them.

What that does for you then, is I can say to myself, "There's a photo file for that one." I can pretty rapidly get to the point if I choose to, of saying to the researcher, "Ok, there's seven different photo files, and I'll let you look through them." I do that quite a bit. There's an element of trust there. People aren't honest these days.

When we get through the translations, we're making photo files. When I do my copy work, 80% of the time I do two sets of negatives. I do the whole thing and then I do it again. Meaning I will separate them. That's the status of the photo collection. It needs a lot of work. We went through and put all the negs in acid-free paper.

I almost refuse to give simplistic answers to some of these questions because it's not easy. The only way it can be approached now is for someone to come to me.

DAVID DUNAWAY: But there is the possibility of computer searching with keywords as well. But that wouldn't reveal a great deal of the material.

DENNIS CASEBIER: It will tell you what interview touched on that subject. I don't have anybody coming forward saying "I'm a Route 66 person." The Craig family ended up in Essex. I interviewed quite a number of people that were in that family. Colorful family. Cattle-rustling, made whiskey, worked in the mines. Every one of them I would flag their interview as having a Route 66 connection.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Is there a way – we are sitting next to hundreds of these bound volumes – to cast your eye across them and get a sense of which ones might be most useful to a Route 66 researcher.

DENNIS CASEBIER: I could do that. Like here's the Lyons. Roscoe and Charles Lyon. They had a sister too. The only interest in those people is that they were in a family where the father worked in the Route 66 maintenance yard here. That's pretty concentrated. Speith, there's a pretty good photo collection that goes with it.

Here's Maggie McShan. I'm trying to give you different samples of things. Maggie is an institution.

Here's J. Douglas McClanahan. Two of the McClanahan boys bought this property [the Goffs Schoolhouse] before WWII and made a dairy out of it. They sold milk up and down 66. Is that a 66 story? Then they went off to war, and sold it.

An awful lot of this is going to have to do with the experience of that family homesteading out in the Lanfair Valley. I didn't even know they owned this place when I first got interested in the family.

You can go through each one of these and do something like that. Jack Meechum Riddle. That's a good example. I got attracted to that family because his mother was a teacher in Lanfair Valley. Later she was a teacher in Chubbuck. If you go down the Parker Branch [of the railroad] a ways there is Chubbuck. Why do we care about Chubbuck? The Riddles bought the station at Chambless on 66, operated it for years. I'm really interested in that part of his story where he's up in Lanfair Valley, but I am also interested in what he did in Chambless. Then there's an interview with his sister.

John Frederick Piper, another Chubbuck guy. His family was here in Goffs. I don't know that they had—it's a soft connection to 66. A good photo collection goes with it. Here's Shorty Oswood, he's a Bullhead City guy. Gary Overson, his brother Tim, his mother is around here somewhere. Lived from 1942-1954 in the top story of the depot down here. Is that a Route 66 connection? His father was killed out here on the tracks in 1954.

Maurice and Lenna Swain. They took over the store over here in '62 and it stayed in the Swain family until Robert Ervin bought it. They died in the last couple of years. We're talking about a lot of dead people. Not all of them. Jack Riddle is dead. His sister is dead. Maurice and Lenna Swain are dead. The McClanahans are dead. John Piper isn't. The Lyons—I'm not sure. Then you have to add to this, this many more that are transcribed that aren't bound yet. We have a supporter who says, "Ok, you print them, and I'll pay." We're going to do that pretty shortly.

When I interviewed them, I asked how they got out here. They tell you about where they camped and what it was like. I can go on all day talking about these interviews. Margaret Moore, she did talk about going up 66 to get here. In interviews that otherwise aren't connected to the highway.

DAVID DUNAWAY: That's one thing we haven't talked about is that I have a personal interest in. How have you managed to organize such a large group of volunteers to work with you on your collections?

DENNIS CASEBIER: I can tell you, but it's rare that anybody listens to me.

DAVID DUNAWAY: I'm all ears.

DENNIS CASEBIER: I start out by saying that we must know how to do it. Because it worked. We came here. Look at this place, what it amounts to. There hasn't been a grant into this place in the 16 years we've been here. The library will be the first one. There's a couple of aspects to it. One of them is, I'm a firm believer that there's a lot of

people out there that want to do something worthwhile, something that's lasting and meaningful—I really believe that. I really believe we don't have to make all our stuff in China.

People are motivated to contribute to it. Some contribute with money, some with time, which in the long-run is even more valuable. Part of that period that we were able to do that, I owned it all. We were able to do it anyway. There was an element from time to time that thought, "Hmm, we're just doing this for Casebier." But now that we have given all the property away, appraised at $400,000, I feel better about it. They trusted me to begin with. So I guess they have to trust you.

Another key element to my mind is that you must give credit. And I do that with a vengeance. In the newsletter – when we get so many together we publish them in a book – everything that everybody does is in that newsletter and we put a name index in the back of the book. You must give credit.

There's one more that's kind of touchy. Ya'll have to pull together. It's hard not do in an institution where you're paying somebody wages. Imagine how difficult it is when you're not paying them anything. When somebody comes along that is not happy with the direction, we do not resist letting them go. I don't try to save them. I see myself as a nurturer, but not a reformer. If somebody comes along and doesn't think we're doing it right, doesn't think we're going in the right direction, I'll tell them that we're obviously successful. I'm ready for people to exercise leadership, but I insist that they first understand what we're doing. Then we can talk about how it ought to be changed. If they continue to not do that and to be disruptive, then I'm ready for them to leave.

I don't ask anybody to leave, but I don't ask them to do anything either. It depends how disruptive they are. There's been one time where we had a guy who drank too much and I had somebody talk to him and he left. We do drink, we have nice parties—that's an important part of this, by the way.

There's a lady over there doing work in the school house, and we'll probably have her over for dinner tonight. Those dinners we have are important. Jo Ann does them all. We try to get six or eight people and have these dinners. We can't do it throughout the day because when you're here you're working, you're not playing. Dinner is something that everybody has to do.

We have had trouble-makers. We have had people that don't like what we're doing and how we're doing it. And when that gets to a certain point, then, without asking them to, I encourage them to leave. That's hard to do sometimes because they might be doing something useful. When you're desperate for volunteer work, there's a temptation to accommodate them. It ain't worth it. Keep the positive ones and keep moving.

DAVID DUNAWAY: Do you have any public recognition events?

DENNIS CASEBIER: We have the Rendezvous every year. I view the record that we keep in the newsletters as public recognition. Then, at the Rendezvous in the Fall, we have a session where we give out what we call the Wagon Master Awards. Those are the high achievers. Another thing I do is, if a dignitary shows up, if there's a person

here doing something, I'll go to the trouble of recognizing them to the dignitary. That aspect does not take care of itself and it's very important.

So, you have to convince people you're doing something worthwhile, and is of lasting value. You have to recognize what they do and you can't cling too hard to folks. They aren't getting paid, and you can't discipline anybody.

DAVID DUNAWAY: I'm really interested in this process because I myself have some experience in this and successes and failures. Let's say you have someone who calls you up and says they heard about what you're doing and I'd like to help out. You tell them that's fine, we like people who want to help out. You ask them what their skills are, what they can contribute and then they get to a point where they say they can type and you could mail them a model transcript and tape. Then you mail it to them. You give them a call, they say things are fine. A month goes by, you haven't heard a word from them. What do you do next?

DENNIS CASEBIER: If you have a person who takes off with an interview and then they stall like that, at some point I try to bring it to a head, and I'm quick to say this ain't for everybody. In fact, I say that when they take it. "If you get this home and this isn't for you, bring it back. It's not for everybody. There may be something else here you'd like to do." Maybe the place isn't for them. It's for them to decide.

That newsletter plays a key role in how we get these volunteers. If somebody calls me up and says they might like to do something out here, I tell them they should spend some time out here and get the newsletter. Then they can decide if there might be something in there they'd like to try. That's the way I do that. That newsletter is absolutely critical to the success of this operation. Twice a year won't do it. A lot of historical sites put out a newsletter twice a year and it doesn't amount to much. They don't have 800 members either.

DAVID DUNAWAY: I think that's really important, what we've been talking about because in addition to the achievement of amassing such a library, and amassing such an oral history and photographic collection, what you have gotten is a historical movement. That, I would almost say of all of them, would be the hardest part. You can buy books, you can do interviews.

DENNIS CASEBIER: I've said that over and over again. Now the interviews are priceless, though. To try to make people understand how important some of this other stuff is, I frequently tell them that it is a good library but it's only money. This is priceless.

DAVID DUNAWAY: That's a great place to end. Before we go, I have to ask if I have permission to use this material in my writing and research and broadcasting.

DENNIS CASEBIER: You can use it.