



Flood, The Pipe Man

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The Cotton Bowl was overflowing for the annual O.U.-Texas game. A soft billow of wispish blue smoke hung over the crowd as cigarette, cigar and pipe smokers calmed their nerves, waiting for the next play.

"Go get me a cup of coffee," one upset woman asked her husband.

"I don't know where the coffee stand is," replied her spouse, unwilling to miss the next play.

"Well, it's down there someplace. I can smell it cooking," his wife stated emphatically.

A man seated a few seats away, couldn't help smiling. It wasn't the first time a freshly-packed pipe bowl of Demi-Tasse tobacco had deluded people into believing they were smelling coffee. And John Flood, '34-'37, hoped it would last.

Two years have passed since the conversation was overheard, and, since the demand for Flood's original Demi-Tasse tobacco continues, he feels safe in assuming that the smoking public as well as the breathing public likes the brand of tobacco that appeals to the thirst buds.

The interest in fine tobaccos and pipes that led Flood to originate his coffee flavored tobacco and to his prosperous business as a pipe and fine tobacco wholesaler in Oklahoma City began during his last years at Ft. Cobb high school. "I just took up a pipe like some boys do cigarettes," Flood recalls.

With pipe in hand, Flood enrolled in O.U.'s Journalism School in 1934. As a high point in his 3-year University career, Flood pointed to a picture of the Sooner band of 1934 that hangs behind his desk in the Merchandise Mart in Oklahoma City. Casually, but still proudly 20 years later, Flood mentioned that he was drum major that year.

Three years after enrolling he left school to work as a shoe salesman in an Oklahoma City department store. In 1939 he joined the Phillip-Morris company and served as salesman in Oklahoma City and later as division manager for them in Houston. In 1949 he moved back to Oklahoma City and established his present wholesale tobacco goods firm.

He had a good deal of help and encouragement in setting up for himself from his only partner in the business, Mrs. Evelyn Eichor Flood. Married in 1940, the couple has two children, John Dennis, 11, and Kaye, 9.

On John Flood's desk in Oklahoma City stand three pipe racks. They hold 60 well-used pipes. I was curious that any man should find 60 pipes useful, but Mrs. Flood assured me that I had seen only a part of her husband's every-day pipe assortment.

"John keeps 6 or 7 more on the sun visor of his car and he has several at home," she told me.

How a man could find a use for that many pipes remained a mystery to a non-pipe smoker until I asked a man who owns some.

"I never like to use the same pipe twice in succession," Flood said. "Varying the use of a pipe keeps it from becoming a 'hot' smoker." He estimates that he has well over 100 pipes in his smoking collection.

Not for smoking purposes, although they are all usable, is Flood's collection of fancy pipes. As a natural outcropping of his business, he has become an insatiable rare pipe collector. With approximately 450 pipes in his special collection, Flood talks glowingly of recent additions. Stand-outs include:

Pipes are his business and his pleasure. Examples opposite page are from private collection.

1) an opium pipe from China; 2) an antique meerschaum from the Ole Curiosity Shoppe, London; 3) a pre-historic stone age pipe, excavated from a tomb near Samaria, Jordan, believed to be smoked by Romans about the time of Christ; 4) a miniature pipe less than an inch long, fully capable of being smoked; 5) a sacred water pipe from Damascus, Syria, and 6) a Lincoln-head pipe with amber stem.

With his business and personal interest in pipes snowballing at every turn, it was somewhat natural that he should originate his own tobacco. He had experimented for some time by mixing his own tobaccos, trying to find an aroma that would be pleasing and a tobacco that would be satisfying. One of his attempts produced a mix that had the flavor and smell of coffee. Several of his friends asked him to make them up an order and before long he was in business.

Flood had no facilities for mixing his Demi-Tasse but a leading tobacco firm

agreed to handle production for him. He owns the copyright to the name Demi-Tasse and is the sole distributor of the mix to retailers and through direct orders (pipe-smokers can write John Flood, Flood Briar Pipe Co., Merchandise Mart, 21 W. Main, Oklahoma City, if they would care to sample Demi-Tasse and can't find it locally).

Since the cigarette industry has recently become suspect due to reports of a possible connection with cigarette smoking and lung cancers, I asked Flood if his business had experienced an upturn.

"The whole pipe industry is up something like 42 percent," he said. "My business is showing a similar increase."

Since John Flood has ridden his hobby horse to a business victory, it would be natural to assume that his time was filled completely with family and smoke. Such an assumption would be inaccurate. He also collects coins ("I have a good collection of half-dollars"); is a sports fan ("I haven't

missed the O.U.-Texas game in 22 years—you know, I went to O.U. to play football but injured a knee"), and shoots golf in the 70s.

Probably one of the greatest tragedies of his life took place on a golf course. It happened in Oklahoma City. Flood and a friend were set to tee off on a 209-yard, par 3 hole at the Woodson Golf course. Flood drove first. Then his friend stepped up. His drive carried the full 209 yards with pinpoint accuracy for a hole-in-one. Flood managed to hit the cup on his second shot for a birdie. He thinks he is probably one of the few men in the country who 2-stroked a hole and lost.

Every year Flood travels 50,000 miles on his rounds of Texas and Oklahoma and parts of Arkansas and Kansas. With him go his well used pipes over the sun visor, another in his teeth and others ready to be displayed to retailers.

This is his business and his pleasure. Small wonder that he's called—Flood, the Pipe Man.



PIPE WHOLESALER AND COLLECTOR John Flood, '34-'37, sits behind some of the most interesting pipes in his collection. He is pictured holding a Prussian officers pipe over 400 years old. At extreme left, sacred water pipe. Note tiny pipe in right foreground; measures less than an inch and smokes.