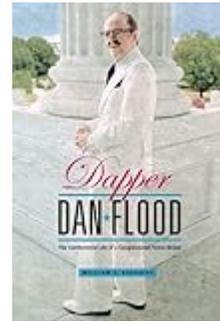


William C. Kashatus. *Dapper Dan Flood: The Controversial Life of a Congressional Power Broker.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015. 368 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-271-06755-1; \$30.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-03618-2.



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Pennsylvania congressman Dan Flood was known for a flamboyant and often controversial style. He was not above being outrageous, contentious, and pompous. A Broadway actor, pugilist, and trial lawyer who often sported a wardrobe complete with Edwardian haberdashery and handlebar mustache, he was always immaculately appareled, sometimes in a stunning white linen suit, white silk hat, and black cape. He gave new meaning to sartorial splendor and cut quite a figure unlike any member of Congress who served with him—perhaps before or after—during his lengthy congressional career. His speeches often resembled one of his theatrical performances. Flood represented Pennsylvania’s Eleventh Congressional District for thirty-two years, in what was once the heart of the anthracite coal industry. William Kashatus has written the only comprehensive biography of the man called Dapper Dan. Flood’s long congressional career was checkered with defeats in 1942, 1946, and the last one in 1952, in a district in transition from a Republican stronghold to a Democratic one. Flood was indefatigable and returned to Congress in 1955 never to be defeated again at the polls.

He tried during his first years in Congress to extend the viability of the anthracite coal industry, long a vital economic component of his district. Try as he would

with federal assistance, he could not halt the decline of the industry caused by the transition of the economy away from coal and the growth of natural gas and oil for use in business and households. Still, he stood steadfast for the miners in his support in 1969 of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act, landmark legislation that provided compensation for those afflicted with black lung disease. As chair of the Health, Education, and Welfare Committee, and the vice chair of the Defense Appropriations Committee, he was well situated to provide assistance not merely for his own district but for those of many other members of Congress as well. One example was his support for redevelopment in the entire Appalachian region when President John F. Kennedy signed, in 1961, his Area Redevelopment Act, cosponsored with Illinois senator Paul Douglas.

Kashatus challenges the conventional wisdom that Flood was nothing more than a hack politician who spent his days in Congress doing little more than bringing home the bacon, and who expressed scant interest in national affairs. He argues that he was the product of his times, when members of Congress routinely used their offices for lush funds, taking costly junkets abroad, accepting expensive gifts and lucrative honoraria, and using hefty campaign contributions for personal use (p.

288). With Flood, however, the difference was often the manner in which he was able to marry the interest of his own district more broadly with national interests. Flood was a firm supporter of the New Deal when he started his political career and the Great Society's legislative agenda when he was a member of Congress, with its transformative domestic programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid. As expected he actively promoted and secured funding for his district in a variety of Great Society programs, notably in the billion dollar appropriation for Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and Head Start. He also skillfully secured the decision to run Interstate 81 through his district.

In foreign affairs he was a hawk. His tenure in Congress coincided with the Cold War and Flood was a Cold War warrior. He routinely railed against the Soviet Union, arguing in support of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan as bulwarks against expanding worldwide Communism. His particular concern was Eastern Europe. More than half of his constituents traced their ancestry to that region and he steadfastly pushed for a more vigorous foreign policy to assist the plight of those living under Communist rule behind the Iron Curtain. Perhaps the high point in his career was his personal leadership in combatting the effects of the disastrous flooding caused by Hurricane Agnes, the 1972 storm that racked the East Coast before veering westward through New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It caused record flooding of the Susquehanna Valley and inundated much of the Wyoming Valley. He personally took charge of the relief and recovery, memorably uttering, "This is going to be

one flood against another," and importantly securing the passage of badly needed federal funds for the recovery (p. 206).

At end of his congressional career, Flood was beset by an addiction to pain killers and alcohol. His problems compounded when a trusted aide, Stephen B. Elko, was found guilty of obtaining government contracts for a variety of interests while taking payments for his work, and, in the process, provided evidence that Flood himself had taken payments. In 1978, Flood was charged with three counts of perjury by a grand jury. Despite the indictment, he was overwhelmingly elected to a sixteenth term following a mistrial; he was convicted in a second trial when he pleaded guilty to one misdemeanor count of conspiracy in violation of federal campaign laws for accepting payoffs. Flood was placed on one-year probation and returned to his beloved Wilkes-Barre, ever the local celebrity nonetheless.

Kashatus is clear from the start that his research interest in Flood was in large part due to encouragement by his great-uncle John Kashatus, a close friend of Flood, and others who knew the congressman personally. Though the book is clearly revisionist, an attempt to reverse many previously held views about Flood, the author is successful in writing a balanced and thoroughly researched biography. He has little difficulty pointing out and detailing his subject's shortcomings, but he explains them in the context of the times. The biography is rich in detail and provides keen insights into many of the national and international events that occurred during Flood's long congressional career, often relating them to his constituents.

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