

## Champagne Charlie: The Frenchman Who Taught Americans to Love Champagne

**Don Kladstrup**

**Petie Kladstrup**

Potomac Books (Nov 1, 2021)

Hardcover \$32.95 (296pp)

978-1-64012-394-6

Don and Petie Kladstrup's *Champagne Charlie* is the enjoyable biography of Charles Heidsieck, a dazzling, daring, and adroit French champagne merchant who risked his life and limbs to sell his esteemed bubbly to Americans in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Kladstrups—American journalists who reside in France—learned about Heidsieck while working on *Champagne*, in which Heidsieck was afforded just six pages, due to a dearth of biographical sources. Yearning to tell Heidsieck's remarkable story in more detail, the Kladstrups contacted Heidsieck's associates and received hundreds of letters and documents. These revealing, observational archives blend with the Kladstrups' astute, detailed depictions of European history, the pulse of American life in the mid-nineteenth century, and champagne's significant place in human history.

Heidsieck was born into one of the greatest champagne dynasties in France, but he aspired to dominate the American champagne market. He knew his entrepreneurial flair and adventurism would guarantee success where other champagne houses had failed. He first visited the US in 1852. He hired a sales agent, and business boomed. Seven years later, the US was the world's biggest market for champagne, and the dandified Heidsieck was its most popular seller.

But there are controversies in the story, too: in 1860, Heidsieck introduced his champagne to the South amid rising social and political tensions. And upon returning to France, he faced bankruptcy because of his sales agent's financial misappropriation. He made his fourth and final trip to the US in 1861 to settle his Southern debts, but the Civil War had erupted, and suspicions swirled that Heidsieck was a Confederate spy. He was arrested and faced hanging. But fate bestowed redemption upon Charles Heidsieck, securing his enduring iconic status.

*Champagne Charlie* is the dimensional, captivating biographical narrative of a man who lived his life with vision and conviction—and who brought champagne to the US.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (November / December 2021)

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