**THE LEGEND OF CHAMPAGNE CHARLEY**

As a statesman, Charles Townshend displayed only average political ability, but his wit, charm and skills as an orator carried him to positions of power in 18th-century England. Townshend's "Champagne Speech," which he made before the House of Commons in May of 1767, became notorious for its eloquence, humor and complete failure to address the matter at hand. However, several days later and much more intent on resolving England's financial difficulties, Townshend introduced to Parliament several measures that ignited sparks of revolution in the American Colonies.

BACKGROUND

In 1766, Townshend was appointed England's chancellor of the exchequer. In the role of chancellor of the exchequer, Townshend was responsible for raising revenue. The Prime Minister, William Pitt was often absent from Parliament due to illness. This situation left the assertive and imposing Townshend to take liberties with his authority.

Townshend inherited the problem of reducing England's debt, which had ballooned following England's protracted war with France. In his first proposed budget, he announced the delay of a law to reduce land taxes. However, Townshend's rivals in the House of Commons overruled him and voted to reduce the tax. This left Townshend in an embarrassing position and faced with an even greater budget deficit. Rather than step down from his position, as was the tradition when a finance minister was defeated on a money bill, Townshend doubled his efforts to solve England's financial crisis -- and preserve his political image.

Townshend assured the House of Commons that he could tap the Colonies for revenue. He had no authority to make this promise or pass legislation involving the Colonies, however, in May of 1767, Townshend seized an opportunity to charm the House members before announcing his plans. Appearing before the House for what was supposed to be a discussion of the East India Company, Townshend instead launched into a speech filled with wit and humor. It was rumored Townshend had been drinking and his oration became known as the "Champagne Speech." Townshend was successful in leaving members of Parliament impressed with his abilities.

Five days after his "Champagne Speech," Townshend outlined plans to raise revenue from the Colonies. He persuaded Parliament that colonists would accept an indirect, or import, tax. Most importantly, the Townshend Acts ended the Colonial legislatures' control of governors' salaries, which would be paid out of the new tax revenues. The Townshend Acts proved disastrous to relations between England and the Colonies. The import tax on tea ultimately instigated the Boston Tea Party. Townshend, however, died four months after drawing up the acts named for him and did not witness their failure.