Community Cookbooks (2008), which drew its recipes from 1950s charitable cookbooks from around the Midwest, including the Evangelical United Brethren Treasury of Personal Recipes from Swanington, Indiana.

The Historic Fort Wayne Embassy Theatre
By Dyne L. Pfeffenberger

When MGM founder Marcus Loew observed, “We sell tickets to theaters, not movies,” he was speaking of buildings like the Embassy Theatre in Fort Wayne, Indiana. With opulence and luxury unknown to most of the audience members who visit even today, the Embassy is a revitalized gem from a brief but important part of American history, and Dyne L. Pfeffenberger’s The Historic Fort Wayne Embassy Theatre will deepen even the casual patron’s appreciation for the place of the theater in the region’s history.

Pfeffenberger begins with a description of the building, greeting the reader as would a friendly tour guide, pointing out the logistics, technology, surfaces, and structure of a space which originally seated 3,100. The book reveals the building’s painstaking workmanship: how tile layers would “occasionally break the tile mold as a signature of their individual work,” and how “craftsmen transferred thousands of plaster castings, still wet, to a mesh laid in the walls” (pp. 5-6) to create the lions, jesters, gargoyles, flowers, and birds that adorn the lobby. The theater’s specifications are amazing: a five-story-tall marquee, Lavagno marble tile floors, ornate plasterwork throughout the lobby and auditorium, chandeliers, and the Grande Page pipe organ. Beautiful color photographs of the modern building interspersed with pictures from the early years testify to the grandeur. The author also offers operational details: for example, the theater was the first air-cooled public building in Fort Wayne, utilizing a water cooling system run from a well beneath the building. A renovation in 1994 resulted in current stage dimensions of eighty feet by sixty-seven feet, a sprung floor, fifty-eight rigging lines, and ten dressing rooms, allowing for the most elaborate of touring productions.

Pfeffenberger devotes an entire chapter to the dedicated efforts of the Theatre Foundation to restore the Grande Page pipe organ, one of the very few organs in the country still intact in its original building. Here the book begins to shine, as readers share in the stories and personalities that made up the theater’s life. Percy Robbins, the first organist, is described as “a dapper gentleman who dressed in impecably tailored
suits, wore an ascot, and carried an elaborate walking stick” (p. 22). Later organist Buddy Nolan, pictured with shiny, slicked-back hair, relocated to Fort Wayne “just to be near the object of his affection” (p. 22). When Nolan instituted a series of midnight organ concerts in the mid-1960s, a group of fans from Detroit chartered a private rail car hooked up to the Wabash Cannonball passenger train just to get to the popular event.

Signed photos of performers Bob Hope, Perry Como, and Artie Shaw, all addressed with affection and humor to longtime stage manager Bud Berger, draw the reader into the backstage drama unfolding amongst stagehands and performers.

Those intrigued by the history of theaters in Indiana and restoration efforts throughout the state can find information and resources through the Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology’s Historic Theater Initiative at http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic/2803.htm and the League of Historic American Theatres at www.lhat.org.

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Restoring the Chain of Friendship
British Policy and the Indians of the Great Lakes, 1783-1815
By Timothy D. Willig
(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. Pp. xiii, 374. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $50.00.)

It was once the case that all Native American history was “policy history,” or the “history of Indian-white relations.” Since 1950, scholars have increasingly moved away from such models to explore more Native-centered approaches that attended to indigenous peoples’ agency in the past. With a mighty heave, historian Timothy Willig’s monograph casts the pendulum of scholarly trends in the writing of Native history back toward the older mode of inquiry: this is policy history with a vengeance. The author adopts wholesale the perspective of his eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British sources in considering Native peoples as “defeated wartime allies” (p. 6). Throughout the book, Native Americans appear as mere ciphers, praised when they exhibited proper deference and loyalty to their British masters, and criticized as dupes or villains (Mohawk leader Joseph Brant is singled out for the latter role).