John Y. Cole and Jane Aikin, eds. *Encyclopedia of the Library of Congress: for Congress, the Nation & the World*. Washington, DC, Library of Congress; Lanham, MD, Bernan Press, 2004. xxxi, 569 pp. US \$125.00. ISBN 0890599718.

Specialized subject encyclopedias appearing on a wide range of topics are characteristic of our time. Coming readily to mind are those on Shakespeare, the Papacy, and African History. To have one on a single institution, however, is relatively rare; to have one on a library is virtually unique. That said, there is so much unique, or at least singular, about the Library of Congress for it to have its own encyclopedia seems hardly surprising. The fact that it is the world's largest library, fulfilling the role of a national library without actually being one, is emblematic of a distinctive status.

This handsome volume is edited by John Y. Cole, head of the Library's Center for the Book since 1977, and Jane Aiken, Advisor at the National Endowment of the Humanities (United States). Both have published widely on the Library's history. They were assisted by some 70 active and retired staff members in writing articles, as well as in preliminary organization and editing. Although there were a few non-staff members participating in the book's planning and execution, it is overwhelmingly an in-house product.

The first part of the volume is composed of 14 lengthy essays on the history of the Library and major activities such as institutional relationships with Congress, the Smithsonian, and the National Archives, and specialized relationships with such activities as copyright, electronic resources, scholarship, and literature. The second part is composed, in traditional encyclopedic fashion, of approximately 80 alphabetically arranged entries, covering a wide range of topics but including each Librarian of Congress. The third part is historical appendices listing senior library officials, legislative appropriations, growth of collections, major gifts and endowments, and chairmen of the Congressional Committees. The fourth part contains a guide to further research and reading, a list of contributors, and an index. The work is extensively illustrated, with black-and-white pictures, along with coloured plates at the beginning.

The readability of the volume is quite good, with articles having reasonable balances between overviews and detail. The level of scholarship is high, with readings at the end of virtually all articles – which are signed. One point worth noting is that a very high proportion of the end-of-article citations as well as those in the

"Further Readings" section are to the Library's own publications. This is clearly an institution that takes itself very seriously.

In fact, the work originated as a bicentenary project to commemorate the Library's 200th anniversary in 2000. Although a new history was contemplated, this encyclopedia emerged as the compromise between the ideal and the practical. In their introduction, the editors say that "the book's goal is to provide a general audience with insights into the historical development of the Library's principal collections, major functions, buildings, and major administrative units." A second goal focuses on "the contributions of key Library of Congress staff members."

For some purposes, this volume may prove more helpful than a full-scale history. The "wide-ranging selective (but not comprehensive) description of the Library and its activities" provides bite-sized information across time that is easily grasped. In fact, the work is a gold mine of frequently hard-to-locate information. That said, the work makes one all the more aware of the need for a full-scale narrative history of the world's most important library.

Two questions come immediately to mind with this volume. First, does it have sufficient distance from its subject to be critical, much less objective? Relatively few warts emerge from this snapshot, least of all those dealing with the Library's well-known problems with administration, morale, and race. Second, when will its digital edition appear? Overall, this important work deserves a place in all research libraries.

PETER F. McNALLY
McGill University

Philip Oldfield and Richard Landon. *Ars medica: Medical Illustration Through the Ages. An Exhibition to Commemorate the Seventieth Anniversary of the Founding of Associated Medical Services. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, January-April 2006.* [Toronto]: University of Toronto Library, 2006. 65 pp.; \$30.00. ISBN 077276056x.

As the compilers of this exhibition point out, the Hannah Collection in the History of Medical and Related Sciences at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library has become one of three such specialized