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Expansion of the Archivists' Toolkit™ into ATReference

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Metropolitan Archivist

NOTICE!

all songs in this
book are filed in
alphabetical Order

Put them back the
same way.

and be sure you put
them back.

Signed
a desperate man,
Woody Guthrie



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The mission of *Metropolitan Archivist* is to serve members of the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York (ART) by:

- Informing them of ART activities through reports of monthly meetings and committee activities
- Relating important announcements about individual members and member repositories
- Reporting important news related to the New York metropolitan area archival profession
- Providing a forum to discuss archival issues

Metropolitan Archivist (ISSN 1546-3125) is issued semi-annually to the members of ART. Comments, questions, or submissions for features should be directed to the editor at outreach@nycarchivists.org. Deadlines for submissions are April 30 and November 15. Similar inquiries and submissions for reviews should be directed to outreach@nycarchivists.org.

Preferred length of submissions is 800–1000 words for feature articles and 400–500 words for reviews.

Metropolitan Archivist and ART assume no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

Expansion of the Archivists' Toolkit™ into ATReference

By Brian R. Stevens

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In May 2011, the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) released the beta version of its ATReference, an enhancement to the Archivists' Toolkit™ which allows archives to register and track patrons. ATReference installs as a simple update to the Archivists' Toolkit™ (or AT as it has come to be known) and provides the first steps toward a robust patron-tracking tool for archives in the AT application.

I worked from 2004–2007 as one of the two Archivist/Analysts involved in the development of the open-source Archivists' Toolkit™ v.1.0, and I implemented it in 2008 at the repository I oversee. Having been both under the hood and in the driver's seat as an AT adopter, it has been a pleasure to see this open-source application so widely adopted and to see firsthand how the AT can help streamline archival workflows. It has been a significant improvement over the home-made systems for accessions, authority control, location management, and EAD production that were in place here in the Western Connecticut State University Archives. While there are some aspects that could use improvement, it works and works well. One aspect of the AT that does not need improvement (though it would benefit from more involvement) is that it is free. It is also open for the community to improve and embellish. The AT has improved substantially since version 1, and many in the archives community have hoped to see this trajectory continue. Unfortunately, some confusion has recently arisen out of the third phase of the AT's "official" development.

The Archivists' Toolkit™ promotes itself as:

the first open source archival data management system to provide broad, integrated support for the management of archives. The main

goals of the AT are to support archival processing and production of access instruments, promote data standardization, promote efficiency, and lower training costs.

Additionally, the AT promises on its introductory page that, "future functionality will be built to support repository user/resource use information."¹

The number of downloads and AT implementers is no longer published on the AT site, but it is safe to say that its user base is significant, and, given its wide adoption, it has been a success. The future of the AT project, or at least the direct lineage of administration, development, and improvement of the AT, has resided with New York University and the University of California San Diego. However, the decision was made to refocus development, rather than continuing to work on improving the existing AT. This refocusing effort carries the name *archivesSpace*. *ArchivesSpace* endeavors to marry the Archivists' Toolkit™ to the University of Illinois's *Archon*. Like the AT, *Archon* has a large user base. *ArchivesSpace* describes its project as follows:

We are archivists and librarians working together to plan a state-of-the-art archives collection management system that builds on the strength of the Archivists' Toolkit and *Archon* open source products, and that incorporates the best of the innovative technical and archive functions. We are funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to develop an architectural framework, a maintenance and transition plan for the existing two tools, as well as a community governance and sustainable business model for the new unified tool.²

Rather than continuing to focus on the individual development of the AT and *Archon*, administrators for both applications are now turning to *archivesSpace*. It is important to note that what the *archivesSpace* group is undertaking is a plan that could turn into a product,

and not the building of a product. Any development will take place after a plan is delivered. Unfortunately, the planned development of a unified product that would abandon the core AT and *Archon* model has created confusion in the user community. While the goals of the *archivesSpace* project are worthy and seemingly congruent with those of the AT and *Archon*, many in the archives community have invested time, effort, and resources into adopting these systems, and for them the prospect of a migration into an entirely new and untested system like *archivesSpace* is neither immediately practical nor appealing. These archivists would, in contrast, welcome further development of the existing AT.

The most appealing project for the AT would be to develop the user/resource use information that had been promised. The AT's lack of patron registration capability contradicts its stated goal of improving efficiency. While implementing the AT enabled us to dispense with our locations and accessions databases, we still need to maintain a separate database for patron registration, reprographics services, and use statistics. Though managing this additional database is not difficult, it would be preferable to maintain one less silo of data and to be able to link the resource components in the AT directly to patron records. In conversations with other archivists, they too have been looking forward to added patron functionality in the Archivists' Toolkit™, and it has been a disappointment that further development of this functionality was not forthcoming from the AT's "official" project team.

AT into ATReference

In early 2009, the user community responded to the need for AT user/resource use functionality. The Rockefeller

¹ Archivists' Toolkit, "Introduction to the Archivists Toolkit," 2009, Archivists' Toolkit <<http://archiviststoolkit.org/node/96>> (28 April 2011).

² *ArchivesSpace* "About," 2010, *ArchivesSpace* <<http://archivespace.org/about.html>> (28 April 2011).

ART NEWS

Archive Center had decided to adopt the AT, but it had reservations about the AT's capabilities; the RAC needed the user/resource use information tracking. When it became apparent that the "official" developers and administrators were not going to add this functionality to the existing AT, the RAC decided to assemble its own team to develop user/resource use functionality and, in the spirit of open-sourced projects, share what it developed with the community. The RAC's decision to undertake its own development has precedents in other repositories which have developed useful plug-ins for the AT.

Marisa Hudspeth, lead archivist of the Digital Program at the RAC, contacted the AT's original developer/programmer, Lee Mandell, and one of the AT's former archival analysts, Sybil Schaefer, to help spec out and build this user/resource functionality. Together, they developed an ambitious five-phase plan that would: replace the RAC's implementation of Re:discovery™ for managing patron registration and duplication services; consolidate multiple paper and electronic patron registration systems; and streamline and automate data capture of researcher services. These phases were described as: 1) patron registration, 2) duplication services, 3) retrievals and use tracking, 4) reference requests and reading room scheduling, and 5) design of a web interface with personalized user accounts. The five-phase project was scheduled for completion by July 2012.³

Since 2010, Mandell has been building functionality onto the AT that accomplishes the first and some of the second phases of development. Hudspeth formally announced the RAC project at SAA in August 2010, and the RAC team has posted each new version leading up to the beta release on the code-sharing site, github (<https://github.com/RockefellerArchiveCenter/ATReference>).⁴ I was brought in to help with testing and creating reports.

What does ATReference do?

This beta release looks and feels just like

the latest version of the AT, but ATReference's (ATR) menu items contain new functionality visible to upper-level users (those with more user privileges).

ATR's data listings behave, search, and sort just like other functional areas in the AT. With the release of ATR beta, the RAC has compiled a manual that covers the new functionality (http://www.rockarch.org/publications/guides/ATReferenceManual_v6.pdf). Most regular AT users will find the Patrons area fairly intuitive and will need the manual mainly for importing Patron data.

ATR installs in the same way as the AT, and the maintenance software downloaded with ATR can be used to upgrade an existing AT-configured database. Archivists will probably want try out ATR before upgrading their production database to accommodate it, but installation is identical to the AT: install the ATR client; create a blank database; run the ATR's maintenance program against the blank database to configure it; start the client and point to that newly configured database.

The first change you will see is in the branding graphics upon starting the client. The more substantive changes are apparent in the menu items. First, in the Import menu, one will see the option to import patron data as shown in *Fig. 1*.

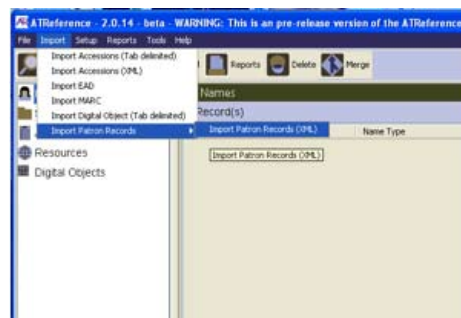


Figure 1

In the paradigm of other AT data imports, the ATR will import patron data in XML that is mapped to fields in the ATR.

The other difference is in the Tools menu where one will find options to view Patron Records, Services, Subject

Reference Report, and Patron Visit Summary, as shown in *Fig. 2*.



Figure 2

First, the "Patron Records" option opens to a patron's name and contact information, *Fig. 3*.

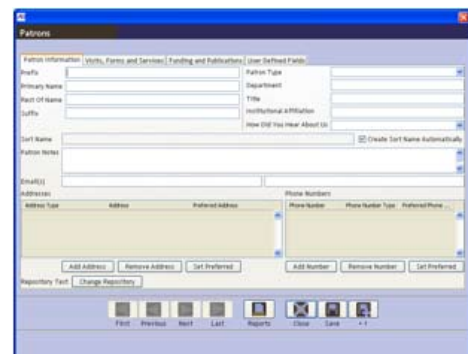


Figure 3

A Patron record looks very similar to a Name record in the Names area of the ATR; a Patron record holds much of the same data contained in an ATR Name record, but with different behaviors. A Patron cannot be linked to a Resource or Accession like a Name. At the database level, Patrons are in their own table. For example, if your repository has a patron who is also the creator of a Resource, two records for that person would exist in the ATR, one in *Continued on page 35*

³ Marisa Hudspeth and Sybil Schaefer, Presentation at the Archivists' Toolkit and Archon Roundtable, Society of American Archivists, 2010. ATRM SAA 2010.ppt, <http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/ATRM%20SAA%202010.ppt>.

⁴ Github is a code-sharing service where source code may be easily reviewed and/or contributed.

ART NEWS: ATReference Continued from page 28 the Names area of the ATR (linking to the Resource as a Name with the role of “creator”) and one in the Patrons area (to describe that person as a patron). A reason for this “complication” is that Patron publications and Patron visits may be linked to Subjects and Names (as subjects). The potential existed for an even greater complication of Names linking to other Names. It was also important to block Patrons information from users who are viewing Names records. The solution was to split off Patrons from Names.

In the Patron record, there are tabs related to visits and services, funding and publications, and a section devoted to user-defined fields. The visits section allows tracking of research topics, dates of visits, and the reference archivist associated with a visit. It also allows one to record forms a patron may have filled out (such as permissions forms or duplication forms). When development is completed, the services section will allow one to link visits and services such as digitization and reprographics (that functionality has not been finished for this beta release). The third tab provides entry points for noting patron funding, that is, research grants or underwriting a patron may have received and the date of that funding. Also in the third tab is an area to enter data on publications deriving from a patron’s research.

The Tools menu item “Services” allows one to enter data on the category of service provided, a description of that service, units and cost per unit, and includes a way to limit the number of units per calendar year, for repositories who may,

for example, only allow 100 photocopies per patron. This area is visible in the beta release, but it is slated to be functional in the next release of the ATR.

The other options in the Tools menu provide users with statistics related to patron visits within a specified range of dates. This feature was designed for cutting and pasting into annual reports. The “Subject Reference Report” provides a list of subjects and the number and names of patrons associated with that subject within the specified period. The “Patron Visits Summary” simply provides the number of visits within a specified period.

Reports associated with the Patrons area provide a formatted export of the patron record or records, an address list, e-mail list, and a patron bibliography.

In upcoming versions, we will see the ability to link Resources or Resource Components to a Patron Visit; this functionality will be the piece that will realize the use-tracking ability that the ATR really needs. Being able to link these types of data will have obvious benefits for creating annual reports and in security, but it will also be useful in guiding patrons to resources. For example, if a patron is researching “railroads,” then the archivist may at the push of a button pull up the sources that a previous railroad researcher consulted. This ability would be particularly helpful in an archives like my own, where undergraduates often have similar topics to research every year.

This beta release of the ATR provides a lot of added functionality to the AT, and future releases promise to address the entire issue of user/resource use functionality in the AT. A downloadable beta ver-

sion of the ATR client is provided from the ATReference github site at: <https://github.com/RockefellerArchiveCenter/ATReference/wiki>.

The RAC invites archivists to participate in the development of the ATR by communicating with the community on their github wiki. The RAC hopes that this project will provide an innovative solution for archives and further encourage wider adoption of the Archivists’ Toolkit™. By significantly increasing the AT’s functionality and taking the open-source model to heart, this endeavor may serve as a national model for contributing to open-source technology across the archival community. It may also signal a trend in the way open-source projects are sustained in the future.

It will be interesting to see how the archives community responds to this new turn in the story of the AT and to see whether the RAC’s encouragement of AT repositories to test and provide feedback on ATR bears fruit. It is the RAC’s goal to make the ATR adhere as much as possible to the needs of the community, while still satisfying its own local requirements.

It should be the goal of archivists to see that projects such as this receive support in lieu of proprietary solution. It is a positive development in the profession that this bit of software, created and maintained by archivists for archivists in an open-source and collaborative environment, has thrived and grown. It is reasonable to expect that this trend will continue, not only with this project, but also with further developments such as archivesSpace and Archon.