

Proposal to Accommodate Structured Events

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1. Abstract

In this proposal, it is assumed that family historians can relate to the concept of a 'simple event' which is something that happened at a particular place on a specific date. More than one person might be associated with such an event through the use of *roles*.

This proposal involves extending that concept to add structure to events, and so to allow better representation of real-life events in our data.

There are two elements to this proposal: to allow protracted events, which have separate beginning and end, and to allow hierarchical events, where an event can be broken down to sub-events.

2. Proposal

Family history (as opposed to literal genealogy) requires support for events to represent things that happened in real-life. Real-life events are not as simple a single date and place though. Events may have spanned a period of time, and involve distinct phases (sub-events) that could have separate places associated with them.

2.1 Protracted Events

At its most simple, a protracted event merely requires separate start and end dates. These, in turn, imply the event has a duration.

In principle, it could have a separate place associated with the two ends but I believe that overloads the core concept, and any such requirement can be handled in a better way.

A simple event is therefore just a protracted event where the start and end are the same. From a syntactic point of view, an omitted end date would imply that it is the same as the start date.

2.2 Hierarchical Events

A natural extension of a protracted event is to optionally specify its start and/or end in terms of other (sub-)events rather than explicit dates. For instance, an event such as a journey is delineated by a departure event and an arrival event.

The start date of the parent event might therefore be taken from the start date of a start event, and the end date of the parent from the end date of an end event. Recall that even a simple event is deemed to have an end date.

If mid-point sub-events are also supported then a hierarchy of related events may be constructed. The hierarchy may be taken to multiple levels as required.

3. Not Covered or Not Required

The proposal does not require that an event (simple or protracted) have more than one place associated with it. It is recommended that this restriction be kept since it prevents unnecessary overloading of the core concept.

4. Illustration

The STEMMA page at <http://www.familyhistorydata.parallaxview.co/data-model> contains a worked example describing a real-life case of 'Multiple births spanning midnight'.

5. Use Cases

An example of a protracted event might include a long sea voyage which has both a date of emigration and a date of immigration, or WWI which has a date that war broke out and a separate date for Armistice Day.

Each of the start and end dates can be defined in terms of discrete sub-events. This approach allows the two end-points to have independent place references, which then has an obvious application for a journey. It further allows the individual end-point events to be referenced separately. For instance, if something in a person's family history was relevant specifically to the outbreak of WWI or to the ceasing of hostilities then a direct reference to the sub-event can be made.

6. References

STEMMA event description (<http://www.familyhistorydata.parallaxview.co/research-notes/dates-calendars>), and specification (<http://www.familyhistorydata.parallaxview.co/home/document-structure/event>).