

Matching Records to People

Which Tom Smith is this? John M. Hoenig describes profiling, chaining and matriculating techniques for indentifying people in records.

AS A GENEALOGIST, I can't help feeling lucky that the surnames I research are extremely rare. What would I do if I had hundreds of records pertaining to people named Tom Smith and I had to pick out just the ones concerning "my" Tom Smith?

To a certain extent, we all have troubles determining which records are relevant and which pertain to non-relatives. I've found the following techniques help me attribute records to people.

Profiling

Records are attributed to individuals on the basis of known characteristics such as age, profession, address, marital status and names of family members.

Thus, two records pertaining to Tom Smith are likely referring to the same person if both pertain to a brain surgeon, brain surgeon being a rather uncommon profession. Suppose we find a record for a Tom Smith that doesn't contain any information about profession. We'll have to depend on other characteristics. Obviously, the more complete the profiles compiled of our ancestors, the more likely a particular record can be attributed to an individual. It also helps to profile the Tom Smiths who are *not* relatives. This helps us to eliminate records that are not relevant so we don't waste time trying to identify non-relatives.

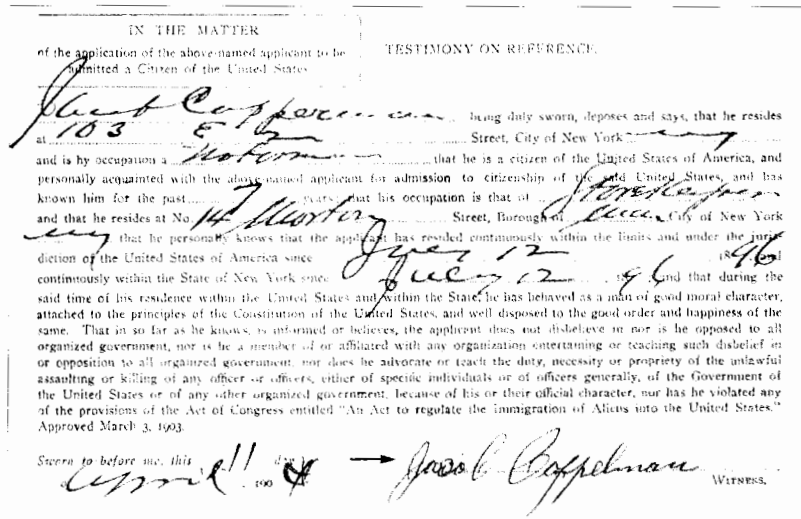
Sometimes, unusual characteristics — such as the names of a rel-

ative's friends — can be used to identify people. Suppose Jack Green is a witness to Sam Brown's naturalization. And suppose you have a marriage record for Sam

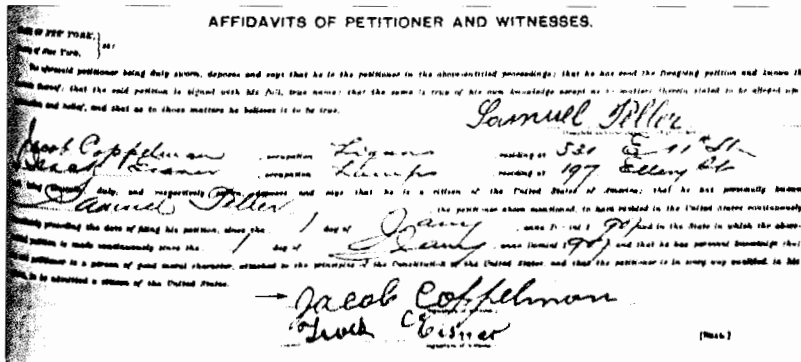
A.M. Peller was my relative. I'd never heard of Samuel Peller before. But, because Coppelman knew both my relative and Samuel Peller, I suspect Samuel is a relative. Further research showed that the name Coppelman was extremely rare (so it isn't likely there was more than one Jacob Coppelman) and that Samuel Peller was from my family's ancestral hometown of Jablonow. It's still not conclusive but I'm actively researching Samuel because the probability is high that he's a relative.

Chaining

It was common for immigrants to try out a variety of names — both surnames and given names — in their new country. They also changed profession, place of employment and address frequently and sometimes changed marital status. However, it's possible to keep track of an individual by using the chaining technique. This consists of trying to find records for every year in the person's life using city directories, federal and state censuses and whatever other records are available. Suppose Tom Smith is a painter living at 100 Main Street in 1890 and there is a Tom Smith who is a carpenter living at 200 Broadway in 1900. Are these the same Tom Smith? If the 1895 city directory shows Tom Smith the carpenter living at 100 Main Street then it would appear Tom



Portions of two naturalization petitions showing Jacob Coppelman was a witness for A.M. Peller and Samuel Peller. What was the relationship between A.M. and Samuel?



Brown. If one of the witnesses to the marriage is Jack Green, the two Sam Brown records probably pertain to the same person. (Godparents listed on baptismal certificates might also be used in this way.) As another example, I found naturalization records for two Pellers as follows:

- 1904: Jacob Coppelman, motorman, 103 E. 2nd St, witness for A.M. Peller
- 1912: Jacob Coppelman, liquors, 531 E. 11th Street, witness for Samuel Peller

changed profession and then later moved. The inference is made considerably stronger if we look at city directories for all intervening years and verify that there is no year with two Tom Smiths.

Matriculating

Masses of data must be organized so that the identities of people in records can be determined efficiently. Matriculation is where you organize your characteristics into a matrix or table. The rows pertain to individuals and the columns refer to characteristics. For the Tom Smith example above, we might start a matrix as follows:

Tom Smith #1 (1890)
100 Main St
painter
city directory

Tom Smith #2 (1900)
200 Broadway
carpenter
federal census

As soon as we add a third entry —

Tom Smith #3 (1895)
100 Main St
carpenter
city directory

— we can see that these three records (probably) all pertain to the same individual.

Consequently, we can put them in chronological order and label all three lines Tom Smith #1.

Consider the following naturalization, passenger arrival and city directory records I found:

1904 naturalization petition,
Moriz Peller, 14 Morton St; signs
name Morris Peller

1904 passenger manifest, Dora
and Sophia Schwartz arrive NY,
go to Jenny Peller, 234 Bleecker

1906 city directory, Morris Peller,
hardware, 432 Hudson

1911 city directory, Arthur M.
Peller, hardware, 512 W.
Broadway

It is not clear how many separate people are represented. Now consider what we can infer with the additional city directory records I found, shown in italics in the following entries.

1904 naturalization petition,
Moriz Peller, 14 Morton St; signs
name Morris Peller

*1904/5 city directory, Morris
Peller, hardware, 234 Bleecker, h 14
Morton*

1904 passenger manifest, Dora
and Sophia Schwartz arrive NY,
go to Jenny Peller, 234 Bleecker

1906 city directory, Morris
Peller, hardware, 432 Hudson

*1908/9 city directory, A.M. Peller,
hardware, 512 W. Broadway, h 436
W. Broadway*

*1910/11 city directory, Arthur M.
Peller, hardware, 512 W. Broadway,
h 37 Barrow*

1911 city directory, Arthur M.
Peller, hardware, 512 W.
Broadway

*1912/13 city directory, Abraham
M. Peller, hardware, 512 W.
Broadway, h 37 Barrow*

Now attributing records to people is straightforward. From the 1904/5 city directory, we see that the Moriz/Morris Peller in the naturalization petition evidently had a hardware store on Bleecker Street.

From the passenger manifest, it appears that Morris had a relative Jenny. A good guess is that she was his wife (though other explanations, such as her being Morris' mother, are also possible.)

From the 1906 city directory we infer that Morris moved his hardware store to Hudson Street. Next, we see A.M. Peller on West Broadway. This Peller may be Morris because he's in the hardware business and his middle initial is M — which might stand for Morris. (By examining more records I was, in fact, able to establish that A.M. Peller was Morris Peller.)

Finally, we see that A.M. Peller became Arthur M. Peller and, later, Abraham M. Peller. Through the use of matriculation techniques, I was able to track my relative over time despite the fact that he used the names Alter Moritz, Moriz, Morris, A.M., Abraham and Arthur.