

CHRAPKOWSKI

Requested by John Ruther: “Marianna Chrapkowska was my great-grandmother. She was born somewhere in Poland in April of 1857 and emigrated to the U.S. in 1873. I’d appreciate knowing the meaning of the name, but also, from where her family may have originated.”

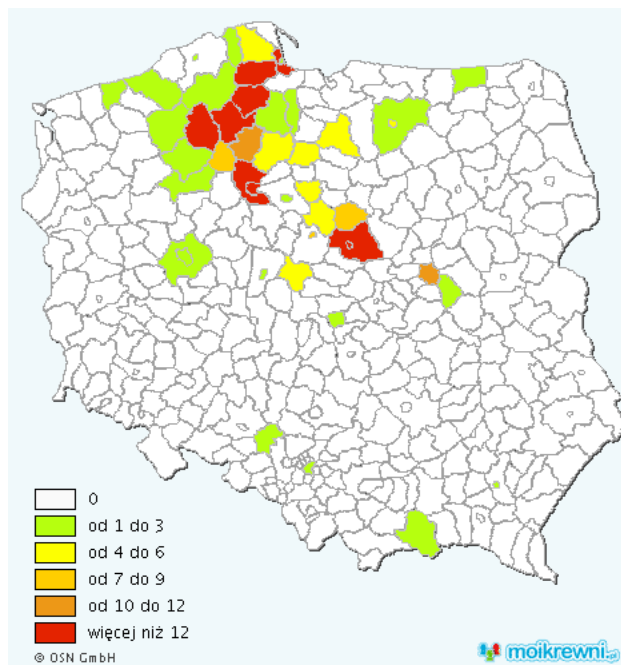
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In Polish **Chrapkowska** is the feminine form of this name, and the masculine version is **Chrapkowski**. This name is pronounced roughly “h’ropp-KOFF-skee.” In Polish *Ch-* is a guttural sound, kind of like the *ch* in German “Bach.” You might describe it as an *H* with attitude. So if you can say that sound before “ropp,” rhyming with *crop*, you’ll have it. If you can’t quite get that guttural right, pronounce the first part like our word *crop* and you’ll be close.

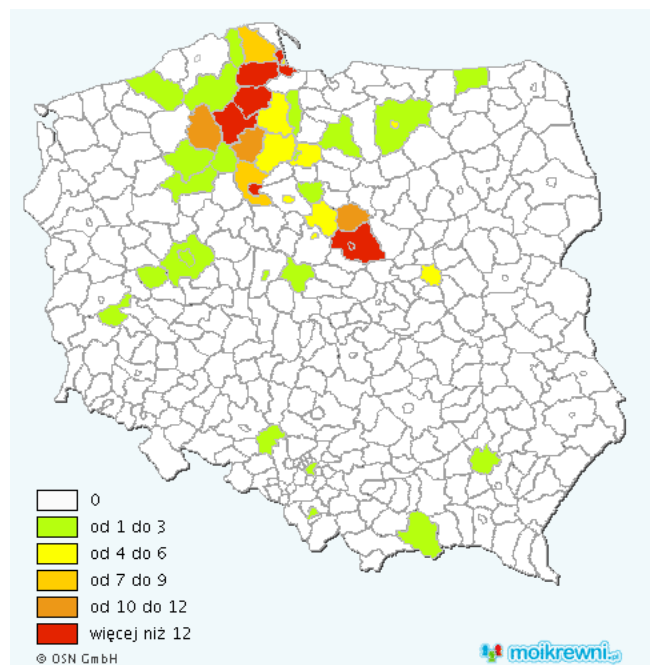
Data available at the Moikrewni web site shows 339 Polish citizens going by the masculine form of this name, *Chrapkowski* (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/chrapkowski.html>) and 508 going by the feminine form *Chrapkowska* (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/chrapkowska.html>). The accompanying maps (reproduced below) tell us this name shows up mostly in north central to northwestern Poland. The largest numbers were in the northwestern counties of Chojnice (87) and Kościerzyna (total 77).

Professor Rymut mentions this name in his book *Nazwiska Polaków* [The Surnames of Poles]. He says it appears in Polish records as early as 1575, and refers to a family connection at some point centuries ago with a place named *Chrapków* or something similar. He specifically mentions Chrapków in Pińczów county of Świętokrzyskie province, in south central Poland. Apparently research has established a link between this place and a family named *Chrapkowski*.

I should mention, however, that there are other places in Poland with names that might possibly produce this surname. There’s another Chrapków near Łódź, and there’s a village called Czyżew-Chrapki in Pod-



Map showing the distribution of the feminine form **Chrapkowska** as of 2002.



Map showing the distribution of the surname **Chrapkowski** as of 2002.

laskie province of northeastern Poland. As usual, the surname, by itself, doesn't give us enough to work with. Only research into the history of the specific family might establish which place the surname refers to, at least in their case.

It seems a bit odd that the places with names that qualify are not very close to the areas where the surname is most common. This is a warning flag, suggesting there may be something we're missing. Still, people did move around. It is not all that hard to believe a family from Chrapków near Pińczów could have moved northwest, and that's why the name shows up most often in that area these days. Or the operative connection might be with the Chrapków near Łódź in central Poland, or possibly even the village called Czyżew-Chrapki in northeastern Poland. The point is, without more to go on, you can't decide.

There's one more thing I should mention. In Polish, a *b* is pronounced like *p* when it precedes a *k*. What this means is that *Chrabkowski* is pronounced exactly the same as *Chrapkowski*. Since surname spellings were very inconsistent for a long time, and were often phonetic—people wrote down what they thought they heard—it is quite possible you'll see the same family called *Chrapkowski* in one document, *Chrabkowski* in another. This is worth keeping in mind.

Chrabkowski can conceivably be a name in its own right. Rymut mentions it as a name connected with a root meaning “to scrape, gnaw.” The Moikrewni site shows 75 Chrabkowskis and 74 Chrabkowskas as of 2002, with the largest numbers in the counties of Gdynia and Wejherowo, in far north central Poland. To make things more confusing, the Polish map site <http://mapa.szukacz.pl/> shows a village called Chrabków just a few kilometers west of the Chrapków near Pińczów. If I understand correctly, however, *Chrabków* is not the name of a separate place; that's just an old spelling of *Chrapków*. *Chrabków* and *Chrapków* sound exactly the same, so the same place could easily appear under either spelling.

I wish I could give a simple, straightforward answer as to the derivation of this surname, and where the family came from. But often surnames simply do not give us enough to work with to arrive at a simple answer. What we can say is that both *Chrapkowski* and *Chrabkowski* are highly concentrated in north central and northwestern Poland; they can be different spellings of the same name; and odds are good they refer to the name of a place, a Chrapków or Chrapki or something along those lines.