

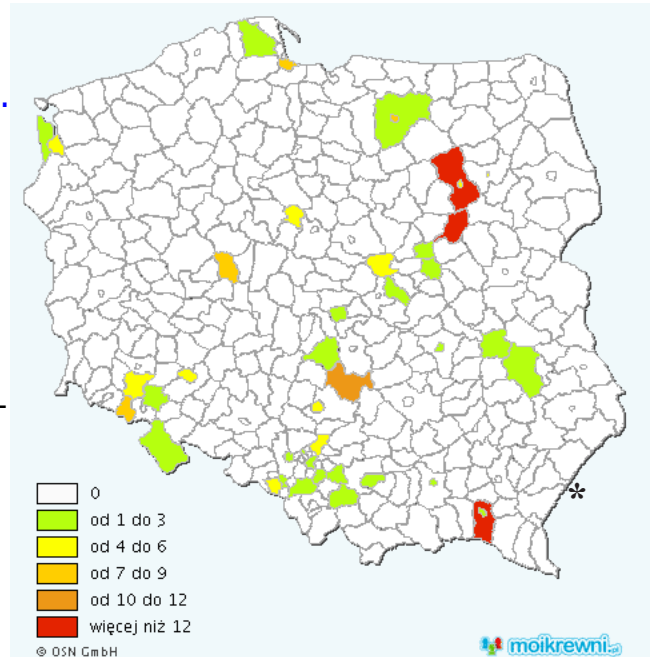
## GASKA — KRAKOWIECKI

Requested by James Tye: “I am very interested in the origin or the surnames Gaska and Krakowiecki. These are on my paternal side and in fact Gaska is my original ancestral surname. The families come from the Province of Mazowieckie.”

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The discussion of Gaska gets rather complicated, so let’s deal with the simpler name first, **Krakowiecki**. In Polish it is pronounced roughly “krah-kove-yett’-skée.” The traditional feminine form is **Krakowiecka**, which sounds like “krah-kove-yett’-skah.”

The data from the Moikrewni Web site shows that as of 2002 there were 218 Polish citizens who went by the masculine form of the name (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/krakowiecki.html>) and 210 who went by the traditional feminine form (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/krakowiecka.html>). The frequency and distribution of these forms is virtually identical, as you’d expect; that’s why I’ve only pasted in the map for the masculine version at right, as the map for *Krakowiecka* looks almost exactly the same. There was no one area with an overwhelming concentration of the names, but they showed up most often in the counties of Ostrołęka (29+27) and Wyszaków (24+17), both in Mazowieckie province, as well as in Krosno county of Podkarpackie province (22+22), which is in southeastern Poland. These are, of course, the counties colored red in the maps.



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

Polish name expert Professor Kazimierz Rymut mentions **Krakowiecki** in his book *Nazwiska Polaków* [The Surnames of Poles]. He says the name appears in Polish records as early as 1468 and refers to family origin in or near Krakowiec, which was in the *Kresy* or Eastern Borderlands, territory once ruled by Poland but now in the independent nations of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. Krakowiec is the Polish name of a town now in Ukraine and called *Краковець* [Krakovets’], right on the Polish border—in fact, the Wikipedia site <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krakowiec> says there’s a border crossing point there. I’ve placed an asterisk in the map above at the approximate location of this town.

I notice Boniecki’s *Herbarz Polski* [Polish Armorial] mentions nobles named Krakowiecki who lived in Przemyśl in 1468 and 1474. This makes sense; their name probably referred to a connection with Krakowiec, which is only about 30 km. from Przemyśl. It is plausible that some members of the family settled in other areas such as Mazovia. Nobles often bought and sold or leased estates in different parts of the Commonwealth, moving quite a long way from the places their surnames originally referred to. A branch of the nobles Krakowieckis might easily have settled in the area near Ostrołęka and Wyszaków. That does not mean we can jump to the conclusion that all Krakowieckis living in Mazovia are descendants of noble Krakowieckis. It was not unheard of for peasants serving a noble family to take their name. Only research into the family history could establish the social status of the Krakowieckis living in Mazovia. But a connection of some sort with this noble family would explain how the surname

appears so far north of the place to which it refers. (I could find no other place with a name that could plausibly yield the surname *Krakowiecki*, so I'm inclined to think that is the place the name refers to in all cases—an assumption one cannot automatically make about surnames derived from place names.)

Now, as to **Gaska**. This is a name that presents some difficulties because it includes letters that may or may not have diacritical marks in Polish, namely, *a* and *s*. The original Polish version could have been *Gaska*, *Gąska*, *Gaśka*, or *Gąśka*. The first question is, which of these forms actually is borne by Poles? This may not give a conclusive answer to the question of what the correct form(s) would be, since even rare forms may exist and then die out, leaving few traces. Still, a look at data can often help us focus on the most likely forms.

I tried a search of **G?ska** and **G?śka** in the searchable database at <http://www.herby.com.pl/indexslo.html>. The data there is older and less accurate than that shown on the Moikrewni site, but it is searchable, and sometimes that is a big advantage. A search for **G?ska** will produce all surnames that match the pattern **G\_ska** with any letter in second place, including plain *a* and nasal *ą*. Then a search for **G\_śka** will return names with *ś* instead of *s* in third position. (We could also search for **G??ka**, but that matches too many names; the two searches I've described produce more manageable results.)

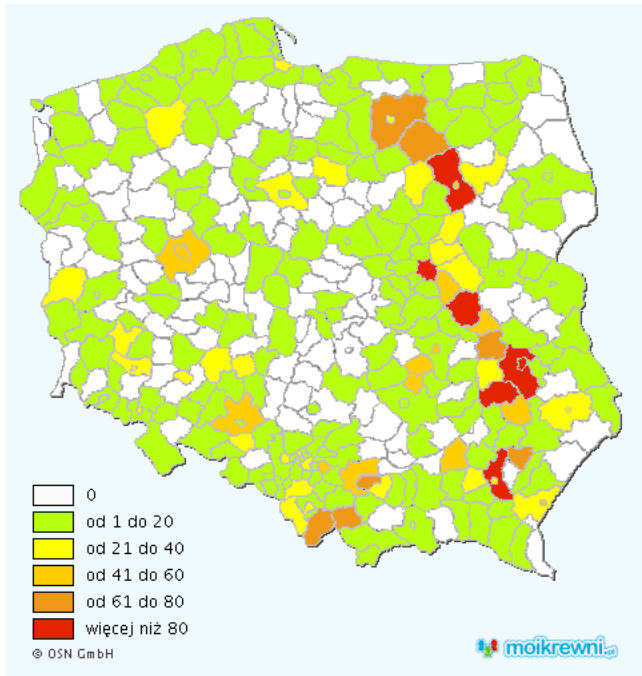
The results showed just one Polish citizen named *Gaśka*, none named *Gąśka*, 50 named *Gaska*, and 4,185 named *Gąska*. This suggests we can concentrate primarily on **Gąska** as the most likely original Polish version of the name, with **Gaska** also worth a look.

Incidentally, I also did a quick search for **G?ski** and **G?śki** to confirm what I suspected: that this “Gaska” is not a feminine form of a surname *Gaski* or *Gąski* or *Gąśki* or *Gaśki*. Those forms showed zero matches. That is a strong indication that the *-ska* in this name is an integral part of the name, not an adjectival ending as in surnames such as *Kowalska* or *Ostrowska*.

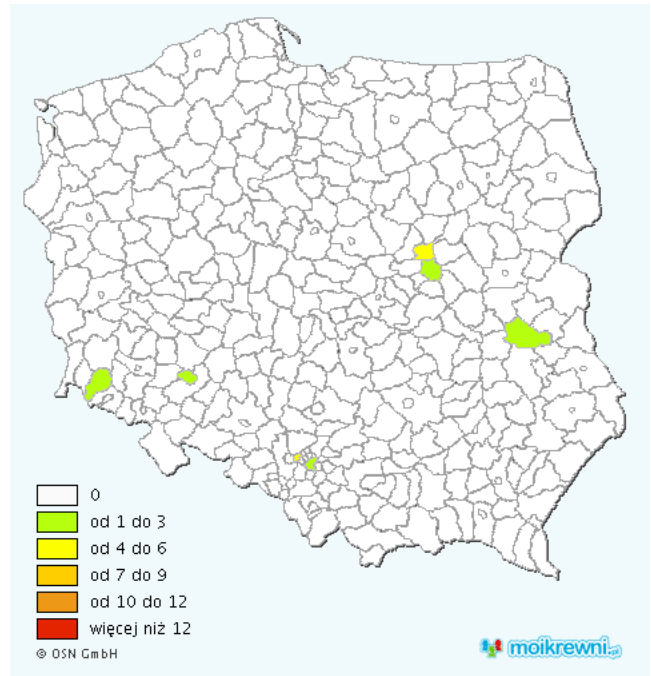
Once I made sure I'd covered all the bases, I checked Rymut's book on Polish surnames, and verified what I thought I remembered: that **Gaska** is really just a variant form of **Gąska**. Polish names with the nasal vowels *ą* and *ę* sometimes lose their nasal quality in some areas, due to local pronunciation tendencies. That has apparently happened in this case. Most Poles pronounce this name with the nasal *ą*, sounding roughly like “gone-skah,” but occasionally you run into someone who pronounces it as “gah-skah.”

Either way, Rymut says this name appears in Polish records as *Gąska* as early as 1269, and it comes from the noun *gąska*, which means “little goose, gosling.” The standard word for “goose” in Polish is *gęś*, sounding much like “gensh.” Addition of the diminutive suffix influences the preceding sounds, causing the nasal *ę* to change to nasal *ą*—a very common change in Polish—and modifying the palatalized *ś* into plain old *s*. So the word for “little goose, gosling” is not pronounced “gensh'-kah,” but more like “gone'-skah.” Why? Who can say? Why do we pronounce “rough” as if it were spelled “ruff”? Languages do what they do, and there isn't always an obvious reason.

The Moikrewni site shows 4,551 Polish citizens named *Gąska*, living all over the country, with the largest number, 342, living in Ostrołęka county of Mazowieckie province. The next largest numbers were in Garwolin county (167) and Warsaw county (151), also in Mazowieckie province. So the name shows up in many different parts of Poland, but shows up most often in the same general area as your ancestors. The Moikrewni site shows just 14 Poles going by the form *Gaska*, scattered in tiny numbers all over the



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



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country: 4 in Legionowo county of Mazowieckie province, 4 in Zabrze county of Śląskie province, 2 in Wrocław county of Dolnośląskie province, etc. The appearance of this form in Zabrze and Wrocław counties may be due to the German influence there; we often see Polish names modified, with loss of nasal quality, in regions once heavily populated by Germans. I can't account for the Gaskas in Legionowo county; but when you're dealing with such tiny numbers, all bets are off.

It's interesting that the 2002 data used by Moikrewni shows just 14 Gaskas, whereas the 1990 data from the Herby.com.pl site showed 50. I'm not sure what caused the difference, but it could be due to greater spelling accuracy in the 2002 data. *Gaska* is the standard form in Polish, not *Gaska*; it may be some of those Gaskas in the 1990 data were really *Gąska*s, but the name was keyed in wrong. I've noticed the 2002 data often shows smaller numbers than the 1990 data for names with non-standard spelling. I know Prof. Rymut felt the 2002 data was far more accurate than the 1990 data.

Lastly, Boniecki's armorial mentions a coat of arms *Gąski*, literally "of the goose" or "geese." There's a Wikipedia site that describes this coat of arms as "In a blue field, a silver goose sitting on a clump of green grass." This probably has no relevance to most families named *Gaska*, but if you're interested, here's the URL of that Wikipedia site:

[http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C4%85ska\\_\(herb\\_szlachecki\)](http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C4%85ska_(herb_szlachecki))

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