

## GENSIEWSKI — KAWA — NAWROT

Requested by Teresa Henry: “According to my aunt, the Nawrot lineage has some connection with Dambrow in Poznań province. God, I hope I listed this correctly. I know if you look at Poznań on the map and look southeast you will see Dambrow (not sure of spelling).”

Analysis by: William F. “Fred” Hoffman <[wfh@langline.com](mailto:wfh@langline.com)>, for UPGS 2008

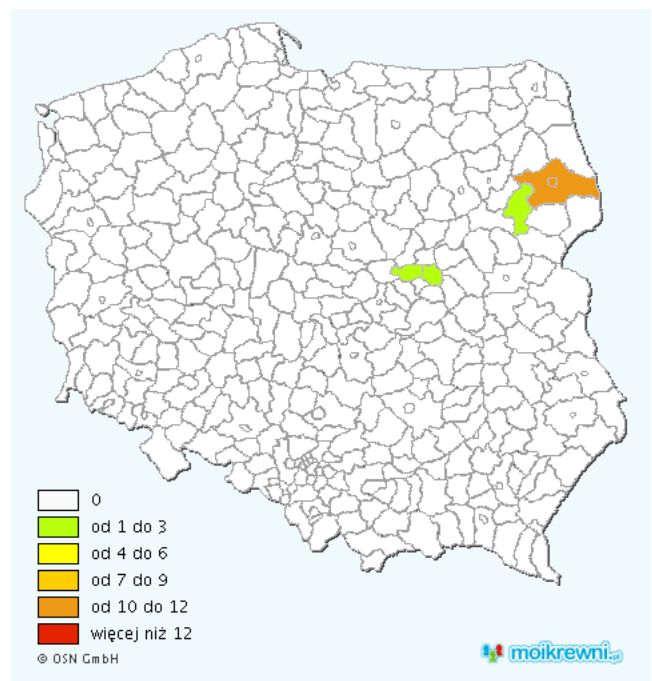
In Polish **Gensiewski** would be pronounced roughly “gen-SHEFF-skee.” But that’s probably a Germanized or Anglicized phonetic spelling of the name. We’d expect Poles to spell it **Gęsiewski**. That name is pronounced the same, because Polish *ę* is a nasal vowel that sounds a lot like “en.” Foreigners don’t know what to make of that letter, and usually write it down the way it sounds, *en*, or else drop the tail and turn it into plain old *e*. But in records in Poland, you’d expect it to show up as *Gęsiewski* more often than *Gensiewski*. Same name, just a different spelling.

The Moikrewni Web site shows no Polish citizens in 2002 named Gensiewski. There were 27 who bore the spelling *Gęsiewski* (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/g%25C4%2599siewski.html>), and 29 who bore the traditional feminine form *Gęsiewska* (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/g%25C4%2599siewska.html>). As you might expect, the frequency and distribution for both forms was similar, so I’ve only pasted in one map here, the one for the masculine form *Gęsiewski*. It shows that as of 2002, the name was found most often in Białystok county of Podlaskie province, in northeastern Poland (males 11, females 18). All the people by this name lived in the northeastern quarter of Poland.

Professor Rymut doesn’t mention *Gęsiewski* in his book *Nazwiska Polaków* [The Surnames of Poles], but he does mention a number of surnames beginning *Gęsi-* under the basic root *gęś*, “goose.” *Gęsiewski* could mean “of the kin of the goose,” referring to an ancestor who was nicknamed *Gęś*, “the goose.”

But I think it’s more likely *Gęsiewski* is a rare variant of the more common surname **Gąsiewski**. As of 2002, this name was borne by 604 Polish citizens, with the largest numbers in the northeast. This suggestion is plausible because *ą* is another Polish nasal vowel, sounding like “own,” and in Polish words the nasal vowels often switch. It’s not hard to believe the name would be *Gąsiewski* most often, but in some areas they might have preferred to pronounce it with nasal *ę* instead of nasal *ą*. Rymut says *Gąsiewski* also appears as **Gosiewski**, and shows up in Polish records as early as 1655. It refers to family origin in the village of Gosie, in Zambrów county of Podlaskie province. In other words, in northeastern Poland, not too far from where the surname *Gęsiewski* shows up.

I think Rymut mentions Gosie because research has linked at least one **Gąsiewski** family with that place. That doesn’t necessarily mean all people named *Gąsiewski* or *Gęsiewski* had to have come from that one



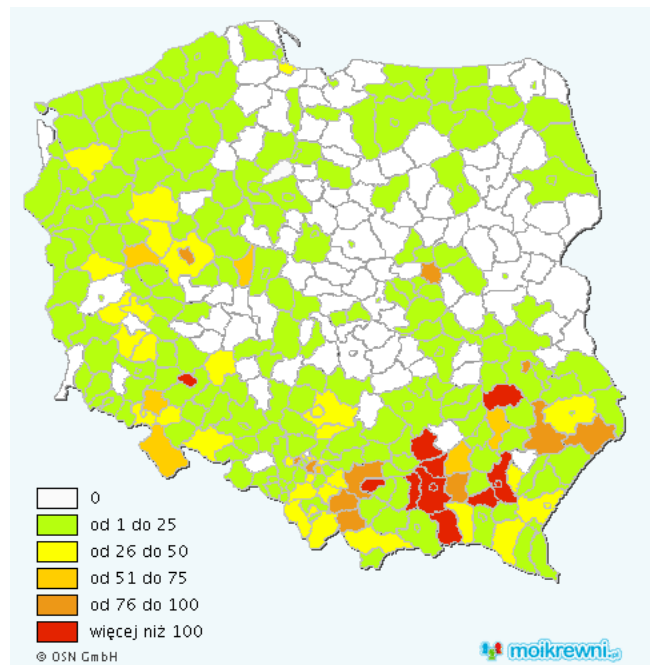
Map showing the distribution of the surname **Gęsiewski** as of 2002.

place and no other. I should add that *Gąsiewski* or *Gęsiewski* could conceivably refer to any of a number of places with names beginning *Gęsi-* or *Gąsi-* that got their names from the word for “goose.” There are several places with names that fit, including a village *Gęsie* in Przasnysz county of Mazowieckie province, also in northeastern Poland.

*Gęsiewski* could mean “one from *Gęsie*.” Or it could refer to some other place with a similar name. Or it could mean “kin of the goose.” From the surname alone, you just can’t say for sure. The only way to nail this down is through research into the history of the family. That might uncover facts that would help you determine which of those interpretations is the best fit. The most I can say is that the name probably comes from that word for “goose,” ultimately; but odds are it refers to the name of a place, *Gęsie* or something similar—and that place name is what came from the word for “goose.”

The surname **Kawa** is pronounced “KAH-vah,” and as of 2002 there were 7,266 Polish citizens by that name. The Moikrewni map (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/kawa.html>), reproduced at right, shows that the name appears all over the country. It is most common in southeastern Poland, especially in the counties of Tarnów (682), municipal Tarnów (320), Rzeszów (320), Dąbrowa Tarnowska (245), and municipal Kraków (244). Still, this doesn’t provide any reliable insight as to where a specific Kawa family came from; it could have come from practically anywhere in Poland.

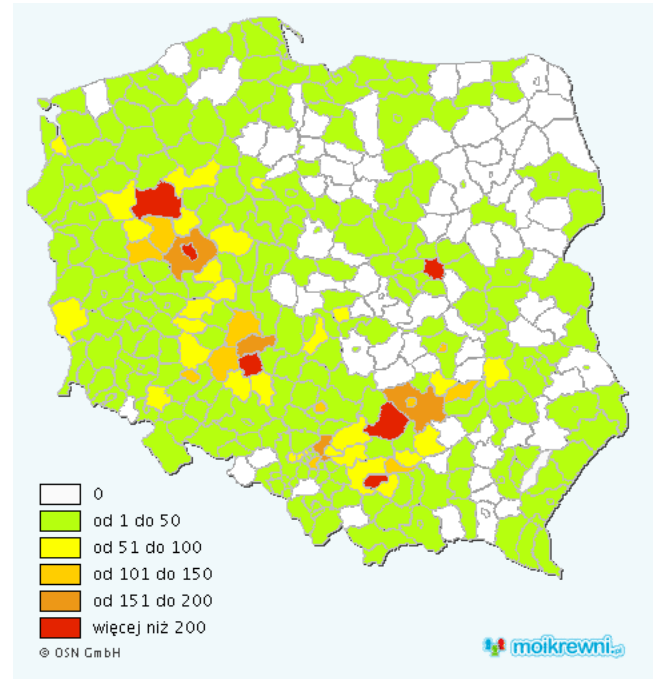
Prof. Rymut says this name appears in Polish records as early as 1600, and can come from the noun *kawa*, “coffee,” or from a variant of *kawka*, “jackdaw,” a kind of crow-like bird, also used in the meaning “gossip.” The use of the word to refer to the bird is native Slavic; the term for coffee came into Polish from Arabic *qahweh*, as with other European languages. It is thought coffee came to Poland in the late 17th century, so any use of the name *Kawa* before that probably referred to the bird; from the late 1600s on, it could have been a nickname for “the coffee guy” or “the jackdaw, the gossip.”



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

In Polish **Nawrot**, pronounced roughly “NAHV-rote,” is usually spelled with no diacritical marks, though one does occasionally see it as **Nawróć** (“NAHV-root”). The Moikrewni site shows 9,851 Polish citizens named *Nawrot* (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/nawrot.html>), only 22 who spelled it *Nawróć* (and you have to wonder how many of them really spelled it without the accent, but the name was keyed in wrong). As the map on the next page shows, Poles by this name live all over the country, with particularly large numbers in the counties of Kępno (383), municipal Poznań (358), municipal Kraków (352), Jędrzejów (302), Czarnków (275), and Warsaw (210). So you can’t say there’s any one place a Nawrot family must have come from. Origin in the area of Poznań is certainly plausible, as that is one of the areas where the name is particularly common.

Professor Rymut says this name appears in Polish records as early as 1542, and comes from the term *nawrot*, “convert.” The basic root is seen in the verb *nawracać się*, “to reform, return, convert,” and in modern Polish *nawrot* can be a botanical term, for gromwell (*Lithospermum*), whatever that is. There is also the noun *nawrót*, “recurrence, relapse, reversal.” But as a surname *Nawrot* would usually refer to an ancestor’s having converted to Catholicism. Of course there were other religions one could convert to. In comparison with most European countries, for much of its history Poland was unusually tolerant of other religions, and was home to large numbers of Protestants, Jews, and followers of the Orthodox Church. But let’s face it, when you speak of “conversion” in the context of Polish history and society, you’d expect it to refer to conversion from some other religion to Roman Catholicism. I’ll never forget the notations I saw in one Latin-language Polish register from a Catholic church in the area ruled by Germany during the 19th century, during a period when Catholic parish priests kept records for all faiths. Every time a person with a German-sounding name was listed, he was described as *advena corrupta*, a “corrupt alien.” Undoubtedly he committed the double sin of being a German and a Protestant.



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

Incidentally, this same root appears in other Slavic languages, especially in the Czech surname *Navrátil*. The famous tennis star Martina Navratilova (originally *Navrátilová*) bears the feminine form of that surname.

I wish I could help you with “Dambrow in Poznań province,” but there is no place in Poland named Dambrow, and there are literally hundreds named Dąbrowa. That name *Dąbrowa*, which comes from the word for “oak grove,” is probably the “Dambrow” you’re talking about. While there are many places by that name, I notice on the map there is one just a few kilometers west of Poznań. That might be the one you’re talking about. In any case, the 2002 data on the Moikrewni site shows 176 Polish citizens named Nawrot in Poznań county (as opposed to 358 in the city of Poznań itself).

I have no access to data on individual persons or families, so I can’t help you much with that. But there may be a way to get addresses for them. There is a government office in Poland that has on file the addresses of all people currently living in Poland:

Wydział Udostępniania Informacji w Departamencie Spraw Obywatelskich MSWiA  
02-672 Warszawa  
ul Domaniewska 36/38  
POLAND

You can write in English, though writing in Polish would probably get an answer faster; and in any case, the response will be in Polish. My understanding is that this office contacts Polish citizens with the name

in question and asks for their permission to give out their address. If that person says no, that's the end of it; but if he or she says yes, the office will send you that information, and you can try writing to him or her, if you wish. Obviously this is no help if a name is scattered all over the country, or you don't know what area to search in. But in instances where a name is highly concentrated in one area, or a researcher knows exactly which area to look in, I pass the info along. If this office does succeed in providing you with addresses, chances are very good those addresses belong to relatives. It may be worth a try.

If you write people by this name, your chances of getting a reply are better if you write in Polish, of course. You can hire a translator—probably the best way to go—or you can try to put together a very basic letter in comprehensible Polish by using any of the various Polish Letter Writing Guides online. The original Guide is the one put together by the LDS Family History Library, available here:

[http://www.familysearch.org/ENG/Search/rg/images/36339\\_LWGPolish.pdf](http://www.familysearch.org/ENG/Search/rg/images/36339_LWGPolish.pdf)

Or this one may be easier to access:

[http://www.polishroots.org/letters/letters\\_polish.htm](http://www.polishroots.org/letters/letters_polish.htm)

I hope that's some help.