

# KAPALOWSKI

Requested by Eugene Kapaloski: KAPALOWSKI.

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In Polish **Kapałowski** is spelled with a slash through the L, and it is pronounced roughly "kah-pah-WOFF-skee." The traditional feminine form, **Kapałowska**, sounds more like "kah-pah-WOFF-skah." The Polish *o* is actually a little longer than in our word "off," but a little shorter than in our word "go." If you can pronounce the *o* in this name halfway between our long *ō* and our short *ǒ*, you'll have it about right.

Note, too, that in some parts of Poland, in everyday speech, people tend to pronounce that ending *-owski* as if it were spelled *-oski*, kind of like "oss'-kee." Until comparatively recently, most Europeans didn't read and write, so spelling of names was often phonetic. You went before a priest or clerk, said your name, and he wrote it down the way he heard it. For that reason, you might sometimes see this name spelled **Kapaloski**, because that's the way some people said it. But ever since literacy became universal in Poland and people developed an awareness of the "right" way to spell words and names, that spelling **Kapałowski** has become standard.

The data available at the Moikrewni Web site (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/kapa%25C5%2582owski.html>) shows that as of 2002 there were exactly two Polish citizens who went by the masculine form of the name, *Kapałowski*, and four who went by the feminine version, *Kapałowska* (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/kapa%25C5%2582owska.html>). As the map at right shows, they all lived in the county of Sanok in Podkarpackie province, in southeastern Poland. (I didn't paste in the separate map for *Kapałowski* because it shows 2 people living in the same county, so it's kind of redundant).

You may already be in touch with these people. If not, I don't have access to further details such as first names or addresses; but there may be a way to get that info. 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



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

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)

Professor Rymut mentions **Kapałowski** in his book *Nazwiska Polaków* [The Surnames of Poles], but it's one of the many names for which he could not pin down one specific derivation. He says surnames beginning *Kap-* generally derive from the root seen in the verb *kapać*, “to drip,” or from the noun *kapa*, “bedclothes, a kind of horse-cloth.” He mentions a dialect term *kapalka*, “whey,” and this surname certainly could be connected with the root of that word.

But surnames in the form *X-owski* often come from place names beginning with the X part, and I notice there is a village named Kapałów in Końskie county of Świętokrzyskie province, in south central Poland, as well as a rural settlement called Kapałówka in Sucha Beskidzka county of Małopolskie province, in far south central Poland, near the border. This surname certainly could refer to family origin in one of those places, especially the village of Kapałów, which is listed as *Kopałów* in the *Słownik geograficzny* gazetteer (Vol. 4, page 371).

Polish experts say the name of this village comes from the surname *Kapała*, which in turn comes from the verb *kopać*, “to kick, dig,” with the *o* having been modified to a *a* at some point. Surnames in the form *X-ala* usually mean “one always doing X, one of whom X is the most prominent characteristic.” So it would seem a person was called *Kopała/Kapała* because he was always digging or kicking. At some point he was associated, as owner or founder, with this village that was called *Kopałów* or *Kapałów*, “[place] of Kopała/Kapała.” Later the place name was standardized as *Kapałów*, and people who came from there were called *Kapałowski*. This is a good example of how a surname can come from a place name, which in turn comes from a person's name.

Now “one from Kapałów” seems by far the most convincing hypothesis I can come up with—just as saying an Englishman named *London* probably got that name because an ancestor came from London. Still, without proof, it's just a reasonable theory. The only way to prove the matter is to trace the history of this particular family back as far as possible, in hopes of finding something that shows exactly how and why that particular surname came to be associated with that particular family. I think it will turn out they came originally from Kapałów; but only genealogical research can verify or refute that.

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