

MOSKWA

Requested by Patricia B. Yocum: “My ancestors came from Markuszowa, SW of Rzeszów on the Wisłok River. I assume **MOSKWA** means the person came from Moscow or was Russian. True?”

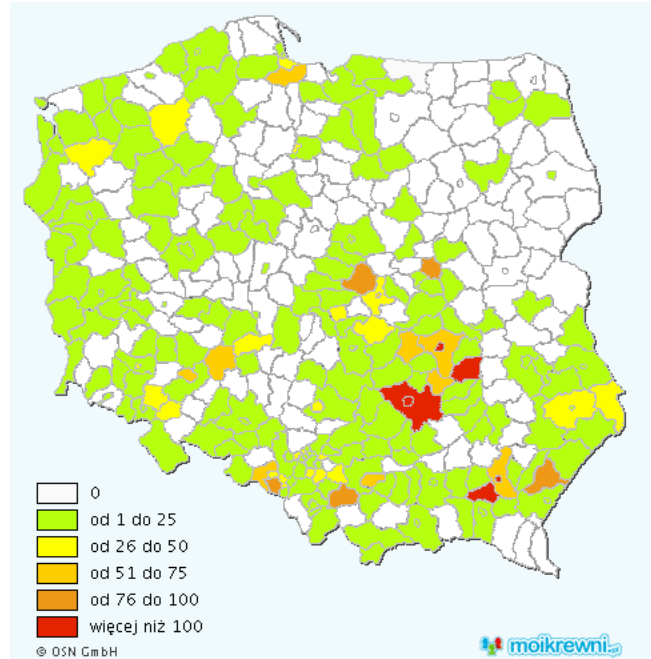
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In Polish this name is pronounced roughly “MOSK-vah.” The data available at the Moikrewni web site shows 4,482 Poles by this name (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/moskwa.html>). The accompanying map (reproduced at right) shows the name is to be found over much of Poland, with particularly large numbers in the counties of Strzyżów (340), Kielce (171), municipal Kielce (162), and so on. Markuszowa is in Strzyżów county (Podkarpackie province). So this data indicates your ancestors came from the area where this surname is most common—though there are plenty of other places in Poland a Moskwa family could come from.

Professor Rymut mentions this name in his book *Nazwiska Polaków* [The Surnames of Poles]. He says it appears in Polish records as early as 1420, and connects it with *Moskwa*, the Polish form of the name of the city Russians call Москва [mosk-vah'] and we call Moscow. He adds that *Moskwa* could also be used as term applying to Ruthenia, the historical name of an ancient Slavic nation covering much of what is now Belarus, western Russia, and western Ukraine, which flourished from roughly 880 until the Mongols invaded and took its capital, Kyiv (Kiev), in 1240. Calling Ruthenia *Moskwa* would not be very accurate, but it's understandable. Recall how Americans often referred to the U.S.S.R. as “Russia,” even though the Soviet Union included lots of places that definitely were *not* part of Russia, such as Lithuania, Latvia, Georgia, etc.

I don't often disagree with Rymut, as he clearly knew far more about Polish surnames than I'll ever know. But in this case, I wonder if he settled for the explanation that seemed obvious, and missed a more plausible one. Knowing how Poles feel about Russians, you wouldn't think a Pole would take being called “Moscow” lying down! I can't help noticing that the *Słownik geograficzny* lists two places called Moskwa in Poland: a village and manorial farmstead in Skoszewy parish, Lipiny district, Brzeziny county, about 12 km from Łódź, at the time located in Piotrków *gubernia* (it's now in Łódź province), and a village in Baćkowice parish and district, Opatów county, about 10 km from Opatów. That second village was created in 1864, too late to be connected with a surname. But the one near Łódź is mentioned in documents as early as 1576; it certainly could be connected with a surname. Granted, Łódź is in central Poland, and this surname tends to show up mainly to the southeast, southwest, and west. Still, a connection with it strikes me as more plausible than a connection with Moscow.

For that matter, was the village of Moskwa, Poland named for the Russian city? I could find no definitive answer, but there's a Polish Wikipedia page—[http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moskwa_\(wojew%C3%B3dztwo_%C5%82%C3%B3dztwie\)](http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moskwa_(wojew%C3%B3dztwo_%C5%82%C3%B3dztwie))—that mentions a legend. That legend says a man named Konstanty Plichta



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

founded this village after returning from an expedition to Moscow. So if the legend is true, the Polish village is named for the Russian city.

I could find no analysis by Polish name experts to confirm this, however. The Polish Language Institute in Kraków is publishing a series of 10 volumes that analyzes the origins of the names of places in Poland. But unfortunately, so far they've only got up to Volume 6, which ends with **Mażutki**. So we'll have to wait until the next volume is published before we can learn what Polish scholars think about the origin of this village's name. I will say this: *moskwa* does not really seem to fit into the context of Polish name origins. Polish nouns ending in *-wa* are not unheard of, but the *Mosk-* part is a problem. For that matter, scholars disagree on where the Russian city got its name. It's named for the Moskva river, which runs through it—but where did the river name come from? Some say it's of Finnish origin, but there is no clear consensus on this.

The bottom line is, it seems clear this name refers to a family connection with a place named Moskwa. The question is, was it the capital of Russia, or the village near Łódź? I suppose both are possible, and it may not matter ultimately, since the Polish village probably took its name from the Russian city. But it could matter in terms of genealogy. Was a Moskwa ancestor from Russia? Was he a Pole who had been to Moscow? Or was he a Pole connected with the village of Moskwa, who'd never been near Moscow in his life? I'm afraid the answer is unclear, and tracing the family history is probably the only way you might settle the matter one way or the other.