

Where Did These Wisconsin Surnames Come From?

Many of these names are German, a few are Polish or from other Slavic sources, a few others are [Oneida](#) (**Skenandore**, **Metoxen**), and there's one [Hmong](#) name (**Lor**) in the list as well. The name **Xolot** tends to pair with Spanish given names, suggesting a Mexican origin. And many names on the list are of Belgian, or French, or Dutch origin. Belgians in Belgium tend to be either French-speaking Walloons or Dutch-speaking Flemings (Belgian Dutch is sometimes called Flemish). Thus the surnames of Belgian-descended people in Wisconsin tend to have either a Dutch or a French look to them. (I'm not able to distinguish a Walloon name from a French one, or a Flemish name from a Dutch one.) Many of the Dutch surnames begin with **Van**, and in fact some residents seem to have shortened their names to just **Van** — but this name is not in the list because there are more **Vans** in Iowa and California than in Wisconsin. And the most populous surname beginning with V in Wisconsin is not **Van**, but **Vang** (a Vietnamese name related to Mandarin **Wang**); but the Wisconsin **Vangs** are not in the list because they are outnumbered by those in Minnesota and California. The Wisconsin Historical Society's [Dictionary of Wisconsin History](#) says that the Belgians in Wisconsin "are primarily Walloons and are tightly massed in a strip running from Green Bay to Sturgeon Bay." It continues: "They constitute the largest Belgian rural settlement in the U.S." It mentions concentrations of Belgians in the cities of Superior and Milwaukee, but says that their original (and continuing) main area is in three northeastern counties: Brown (with Green Bay), Keewaunee, and Door. And *The Atlas of Ethnic Diversity in Wisconsin* shows that people of all three groups — Belgian, French, and Dutch — are numerous in Brown County.

I suspect that many of these names are not only "Wisconsin-specific", they are *Northeastern*-Wisconsin-specific.

The list includes one given name, **Norbert**. This reflects the popularity of a patron saint in the area, [St. Norbert](#), whose name appears on [St. Norbert College](#) and [St. Norbert Abbey](#), both in DePere, Wisconsin.

Here are a few sources on history of immigration to Wisconsin:

- [A Brief History of Immigration in Wisconsin](#)
- [Belgenland](#)
- [Wisconsin Genealogy Resources: Ethnic Groups](#)
- *The Atlas of Ethnic Diversity in Wisconsin*, by Kazimierz J. Zaniewski and Carol J. Rosen. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998. ISBN 0-299-16070-X. (A handsomely produced volume.)