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Major party candidates for governor: In New York, traditionally, it's all Downstate

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Sean Kirst / The Post-Standard

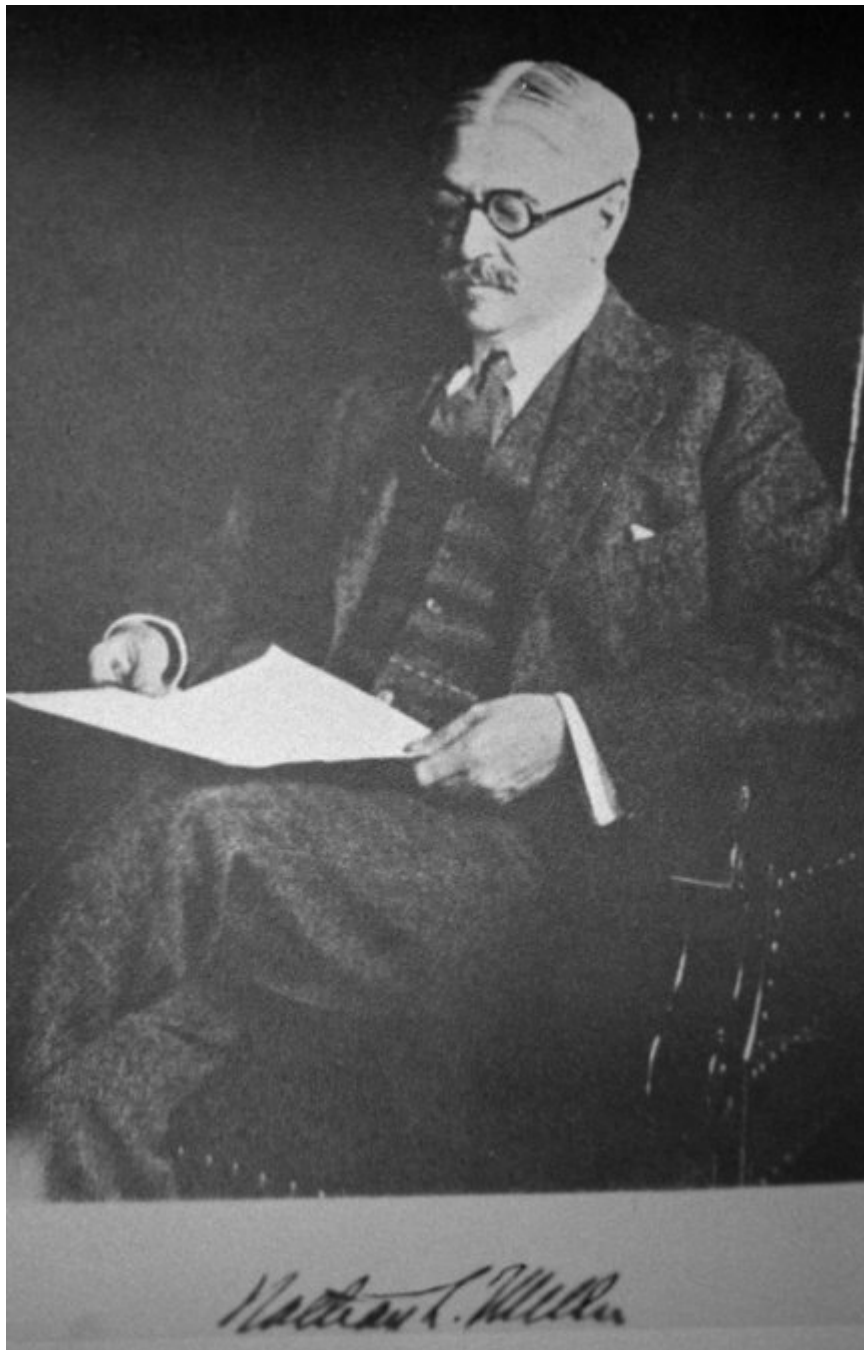


Photo courtesy of the Onondaga Historical Association

Elected in 1920, Nathan Miller - a Cortland-raised Syracuse lawyer - was the last true Upstate governor of New York.

As part of my **column for Monday** about anger and Carl Paladino, I did a little digging to try and figure out the last time anyone born or raised west of Albany (and I leave out Thomas Dewey, who came here from Michigan) was nominated for governor by a major party. Paladino, this year's Republican nominee, is from Buffalo. Four years ago, Democrat Eliot Spitzer defeated Republican John Faso, whose Columbia County political roots are about as Upstate as any candidate had gotten in many, many years - although Faso also emphasized his schooling in Queens. As for Rochester businessman Tom Golisano, he never represented a major party ticket in November.

Outside of that? As I've written before, the last true Upstate governor was **Nathan Miller**, a Syracuse lawyer and a Republican who was raised in Cortland. Miller defeated Democrat Al Smith in 1920, but then was knocked out of office two years later by Smith, in a rematch (the governor's term at the time being only two years).

Up until then, it hadn't been all that uncommon for Upstaters to serve as governor. Since then? It's been 88 years of zero. As for Upstate challengers, my search led me back through the decades, through a line of major party losing candidates you're liable to half-remember - Peter Vallone and Andy O'Rourke and Perry Duryea and Frank O'Connor - before I finally found the answer to my question:

U.S. Sen. Irving Ives, a Republican who was born and eventually buried in Chenango County.

In 1954, Ives took on W. Averell Harriman in a battle to succeed Dewey, the outgoing governor and one of Ives' political mentors. Harriman won as a Democrat, in one of the closest elections for governor in state history.

That was 56 years ago. Fifty-six years. It's taken that long for one of the major parties to nominate another representative of an enormous swath of the state for the top job in New York. Even then, Paladino - whose tempestuous nature led one observer to describe him as **a political "exploding cigar"** - earned the Republican slot only by overturning Rick Lazio, the party's choice, a Long Island guy.

Let me once again list a few grim numbers: It's now been 51 years since we had a speaker of the state Assembly from Upstate. Before Kirsten Gillibrand broke the long Upstate shutout on representation in the U.S. Senate, we hadn't had anyone from Albany or west step into that position since 1968, when Charles Goodell of Jamestown - father of NFL commissioner Roger Goodell - was appointed to the job.

What does that say? No matter how sympathetic - or clueless - our statewide leadership might be, you can't help feeling sometimes like we're the colonies.

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