

Frank Wayland Higgins 1856-1907

Governor Higgins was born at Rushford, in Allegany County, New York on August 18, 1856, and was christened in the Episcopal Church as Francis Wayland Higgins; although he subsequently adopted the name of Frank and was universally known as Frank Wayland Higgins. His parents, Orrin Thrall and Lucia Cornelia Higgins were natives of England, who emigrated to the New England; the mother dying when the Governor was a child, and the father becoming owner of large tracts of land in Michigan, Wisconsin, Washington, and Oregon, ore lands in Minnesota, and the operator of a chain of grocery stores in Olean, New York; adjacent Pennsylvania oil field.

He attended Rushford Academy, and then the Riverview Military Academy, at Poughkeepsie, graduating from the latter institution in 1873, and subsequently taking a course of studies at a commercial college. After extensive trips all over the United States and a short connection as sales agent in Detroit and Chicago for an oil company, young 19 year old Higgins, in 1875, became the partner in the Stanton, Michigan mercantile firm of Wood, Thayer, and Company. He retained this connection until 1879, when he entered into partnership with his father, Orrin Thrall Higgins, at Olean. In 1890 after his father's death, he introduced a profit-sharing plan in the grocery chain store business greatly increasing the value of the Higgins's estate and making it possible to expand his grocery chain business throughout Olean and the surrounding areas.

A staunch Republican, Frank Wayland Higgins served the Fiftieth District of Olan as its representative in the State Senate from 1894 to 1902, and on November 4th of that year was elected after a hard-fought campaign, as Lieutenant-Governor of the State of New York. Two years later on November 8, 1904, he was elected Governor. During that gubernatorial campaign, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote Lieutenant-Governor Higgins for Oyster Bay, Long Island, on the date of September 18, 1904:

Can you come to see me on Wednesday? You know, without my needing to say it, how pleased I am at your nomination. While I was Governor and you were Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Senate, you and I were thrown very closely together and I have never had the good fortune to be thrown with any public servant of higher integrity or of greater administrative ability. If you are elected, and I am confident you will be, the people of the State can rest in absolute confidence that the administration of affairs at Albany will be conducted on the highest possible plane of efficiency and honesty. With all regard and with congratulations, less to you than to the people of the Commonwealth, believe me, your friend.

During Governor Higgins' term of office, 1905-1907, many reforms and improvements in State government were effected, and he died shortly after the expiration of his term.