



Olinghouse (Ora, McClanesburg, Fort Defiance)

MAP

[N 39.6572° W119.42616°](#) Olinghouse, NV Quad

VISITED

June 4, 2016

Our breakfast: Omelettes at Moe's Wig Wam in Fernley.

DIRECTIONS

Take US 50 / ALT 50 to Fernley (27.6 miles); continue on BUS 80 for 3.2 miles; continue north through Wadsworth on SR 447 for 2.3 miles; take Olinghouse Rd for 6 miles.

From Fallon: 39 miles

WHAT WAS

First, info from the historical marker:

OLINGHOUSE

Named for a former teamster-turned-sheepman, Elias Olinghouse, who settled in a quiet canyon at the base of the Pah Rah mountain range to get away from it all. As prospecting activities increased about him, Olinghouse was caught up in the whirl of things, buying several claims and erecting a small stamp mill in 1903 to process ores.

The district was first prospected in 1860; it was not organized, however, until 1899. Shortly thereafter, the region reached its peak of activity, producing \$410,000 in gold and silver values between 1898 and 1903.

Both electric and telephone service were installed in 1903, and in 1907 the standard-gauge Nevada Railroad arrived. This short-lived railroad was completed from a junction on the Southern Pacific near Wadsworth to Olinghouse in February of 1907; regular operations ceased on November 1, 1907. Aside from its short life, the Nevada Railroad Company was distinguished by having the first Shay-g geared locomotives to be used in Nevada.

Sporadic activity has continued at Olinghouse until the present time. Total production is estimated to have been \$520,000.

-Nevada Historical Marker No. 24

Prospecting activity began at Olinghouse around 1860, but maximum productivity did not occur until the period 1901 to 1903. In 1907 inadequate ore reserves contributed to the decline of large scale company mining and the properties were leased to small operators. Placer deposits have been sporadically worked in the Olinghouse area since its first discovery. Between 1939 and 1954 the Natomas Company explored the alluvial fans at the mouth of Olinghouse and Frank Free canyons. Two attempts were made in the 1960's to work the eluvial (not water worked, per se) placer deposits on Green hill, but both operations were unsuccessful

-Field Examination, Bennett, November 1972

and...

In the period of 1897 to 1907

independent miners extracted gold from the shallow underground workings and placer material on the flanks of Green Hill. The Olinghouse Canyon at Green Hill reached the peak of its activity in the period of 1905 to 1907 when a town site and several mills sprung up in the Canyon. A railway was constructed up Olinghouse Canyon to connect the new town site and the mines to the Truckee Valley below. The old Olinghouse town site is directly to the west of the present Green Hill Mine.

-1988 April 8 ,Official Opening - Green Hill Mining Venture Brochure

And just to make sure we have everything covered...

The Olinghouse district was first prospected in 1860, locations were made in Fort Defiance Canyon in 1864, and the Green mountain Mines at Olinghouse were located in 1874 (Hill, 1911). Prior to 1900, placer deposits situated in several ravines tributary to Olinghouse Cayon were extensively worked by Wadsworth residents (Overton, 1947). The period between 1901 and 1903 witnessed the greatest activity in lode mining in the district, with three mills running most of the time (Hill, 1911). In 1906, a railroad was constructed between Olinghouse and Wadsworth, connecting the camp with a 50-stamp mill located on the Truckee River; the mill ran for only three months and the operation failed due to lack of ore. The railroad was dismantled in 1909 and the track was sold to the Nevada Copper Belt Railroad, then under construction near Yerington (Myrick, 1962). After the failure of the railroad, company operations at olinghouse ceased and the mines were turned over to lessees (Bonham, 1969). Only intermittent mining activity occurred at Olinghouse until 1986 when Western Goldfields Co. secured land in the eastern part of the district and conducted limited drilling. Phelps Dodge began work in 1991. Alta Gold acquired Phelps Doge's interest in 1994.

**NV Bureau of Mines and Geology - NBMG OPEN-FILE REPORT 99-2
Mineral and Energy Resource Assessment of the Washoe County Open Space Plan Amendment Area- 1999**

Oh heck, one final overview and that's it, I swear....

Elias Olinghouse had been a teamster between Denver and Salt Lake City before the arrival of the Union Pacific Railroad disrupted his business. The desecration resulted in a shift farther west into Nevada where another teamster line from Wadsworth southeast to belmont, near Tonapah, was established. WHEN the inexorable advancement of age dictated that Olinghouse search for a less strenuous occupation, he finally settled down quietly in a canyon northeast of Wadsworth to raise sheep. Although not a miner, he witnessed the activities of various strangers in the canyon as

various placer deposits began to be worked, and his interest in mining commenced to grow, culminating in the purchase of several claims from a man named McClane and the erection, in 1903, of a small mill to process ores. Needing assistance as the operation grew, he called on his nephew, Henry J. Olinghouse, to join in the management of the enterprise.

Two men, Brooks McClane and F. Plane, originally located the source of the placer deposits on Green Hill in the year 1897. As the word spread, interest developed in the area, and people began to pour in. Some men pedalled their way on bicycles from Reno, 30 miles to the west; others came from Wadsworth, 8 miles to the east. Many mining claims were recorded, and a two-stamp mill was brought to the new settlement, and the left fork of the canyon creek, originally named McClanesburg, or Ora Post Office, and subsequently retitled Olinghouse. Old W. Cattawald "Bill" Williams was ever ready to claim fatherhood of the new town, for he was the one to locate Cabin No. 2, one of the main producers of the area, even though a later sale was made to a man named Dondero and a Reno restaurant keeper named Frankovitch. The pair of them in turn, sold it to the Springfield Nevada Mining Co.

-Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California- Volume 1: The Northern Roads - David F. Myrick - 1962

An interesting part of Olinghouse history was the Nevada Railroad Company. Operating for only a couple of years, it employed special geared locomotives, the only type of locomotive capable of pulling a load up the steep track-- in some locations up to a 9% grade. According to Trains Magazine's [web site](#):

On main lines, grades are generally 1 percent or less, and grades steeper than about 2.2 percent are rare. The steepest grade on a major railroad's main track (as opposed to industrial spurs) was historically said to be on the Pennsylvania Railroad north of Madison, Ind. Now operated by short line Madison Railroad, the track rises 413 feet over a distance of 7012 feet - a 5.89-percent grade. The title for steepest main-line grade long rested with Norfolk Southern (and predecessor Southern Railway) for its 4.7-percent grade south of Saluda, N.C. With Saluda's closing in 2002, BNSF's [Burlington Northern Santa Fe] 3.3-percent Raton Pass grade in New Mexico became the steepest main-line grade in North America.

Mr. Olinghouse was busy with other things other than mining.

COMMISSIONER (SHORT TERM)

E. Olinghouse, of Wadsworth, is a good man for Commissioner. A man of sound business tact, and a faithful man in every walk of life, he will prove qually as efficient as a County Father. Should he be elected, our county will be particularly fortunate.

1878 October 17, Daily Nevada State Journal

They start getting serious

BREVITIES

W.H.A. Pike is up from Wadsworth. Mr. Pike has a

**pocket full of Olinghouse canyon rock that is good for sore eyes, and if Olinghouse does not bring Washoe county out, the Gazette will miss its guess.
1897 May 28 Reno Evening Gazette**

THE OLINGHOUSE CANYON MINE IS YIELDING WELL

**Reno (Nev.) Aug 24-- The Hutchinson Company at Olinghouse Canyon near Wadsworth, cleaned up the first twelve tons of placer dirt run through the sluice boxes at Wadsworth last evening. It yielded a return of \$207, or a little over \$17 to the ton, and as a consequence the owners of the Griner placer claim are very much elated. They will continue the work of sluicing.
1897 August 25, Sacramento Record Union**

OLINGHOUSE CANYON

A Gazette Reporter Visits the New Eldorado

In company with C.T. Bender and T.K. Stewart, a Gazette reporter visited the most promising gold find that has attracted attention in the west for fifteen years, and one that will surely bring Nevada and Washoe county into prominence before snow flies. Olinghouse Canyon is situated about eight miles west of Wadsworth, and we spent the day visiting the mines. If the Hutchinson mine does not make its owners rich the Gazette will give up guessing. The Gold Center has hardly a piece of rock but what shows free gold. The Mountain Boy has a tunnel thirty feet and they are sacking the richest ore taken out, and if they can get one ton apiece they will have all the money they want. Yesterday they came into the camp with a two-stamp mill, removed from White Horse, which they propose setting up right away. If McClainesburg, as the new camp is being christened, does not startle the world as a gold producer, out-rivaling Cripple Creek or any other mining region discovered in late years, not even exempting the Comstock, the Gazette will be very much mistaken.

Brooks McClane and F. Plane first discovered gold in Olinghouse Canyon some time last winter.

1897 June 16, Reno Evening Gazette

REAL ESTATE TRANSFERS

K. E. Stoker to E. Olinghouse 1/4 Interest in Tip-Top mining claim, Olinghouse Canyon; 1/2 interest in Clipper Mine,, Olinghouse Canyon; 1/2 interest in Blue Bird mining claim, Olinghouse Canyon; 100% interest in Golden Eagle Mine, Olinghouse Canyon; 3/4 interest in Red Bird mining claim,, Olinghouse Canyon.

1898 March 30, Reno Evening Gazette

By 1898, things have progressed enough to where we need a place for th email to be delivered and sorted.

A new post office as been established at Olinghouse Canyon, with Mary Norris postmistress.

1898 July 16, Reno Evening Gazette

A PAYING MINE

Cabin No. 2 of Olinghouse Producing Very Rich Ore

Spiro Francovich, who has been down to Olinghouse Canyon for the past week returned yesterday morning. He speaks very highly of his property in that section. It is known as Cabin No. 2 and is owned jointly by Mr. Francovich, Luigi Della Piazza and A. Dondero. A stamp mill has been erected on the grounds and there are twenty-one men employed in it working on ore from the mine. A day and night shift was being run, but this has been cut down to a day shift only on account of scarcity of water.
1901 July 8, Reno Evening Gazette

REAL ESTATE TRANSFERS**Movements In the Realty World For the Past Week**

E. H. Proctor and Leon Allen to W. C. Williams, mill site known as Ora mill site, in Olinghouse Canyon, also quartz mill known as Ora consideration \$3500.
1901 September 7, Reno Evening Gazette

ABOUT OLINGHOUSE

Constable Golding was up from Wadsworth this morning as a witness before the Grand Jury. Mr. Golding informed a Gazette reporter that there were in the neighborhood of seventy-five men employed in the mines of Olinghouse, and said that everything was looking the best at that prosperous cap. He thought this force would be considerably augmented in the near future and said that values were increasing in all the mines as depth was attained.

1901 September 10, Reno Evening Gazette

The camp is starting to get noticed

There is a gold camp at Olinghouse Canyon, which is about twenty miles east of Reno. Three mills are going there. The ores are gold, medium and high grade. Each of the mills running can crush from ten to twenty tons per day. A scarcity of water has retarded operations. Sheriff McGinnis is a leading owner at Olinghouse, having several claims and prospects.

1901 November 9, San Francisco Call

PROGRESS AT OLINGHOUSE

The Springfield-Nevada Mining Company are contemplating the installation of more mills, and will either arrange to utilize the native supply of water or bring water from Fort Defiance. If the former, they will be limited to a nine month milling season, at full mill capacity of 100 to 150 tons per day, while a continuous run is possible with a water line from Fort Defiance.

1904 September 15, Reno Evening Gazette

ACTIVITY IN WHITE HORSE

Three New Townsites Are Opened Up in North End of the District

Large Olinghouse Operators Stake out Claims in Broadmouth Canyon

Olinghouse, Nev. June 6.-- The White Horse mining district has an abundance

of townsites. In addition to the ones at Olinghouse there are three new ones in the country to the northward where the sensational strikes have been made in the last few weeks. Secret City, three miles north of White Horse Canyon, is located on the site of Old Fort Defiance and a mile beyond is Secret canyon, at the south of which is a beautiful flat looking toward Winnemucca Lake and the Pyramid reservation, where another town site is to be platted. Two miles north of this is Broad Mouth, the latest of the new country north of Olinghouse. Here a company of Reno people have located a townsite and here, too, Messrs. Olinghouse, Wilkinson, Williams, and several other prominent men have discovered big ledges of low grade ore. There are a number of tenats in Broad Mouth and there will be many more within a week as the trend of the newcomers is north of Olinghouse.
1905 June 6 - Reno Evening Gazette

Elias Olinghouse passed away in 1913.

DIED
OLINGHOUSE-- In this city, December 8, 1913, Elias Olinghouse. Aged 82 years. [[Gravestone](#) says 77 years]
1913 December 8- Reno Evening Gazette

OLINGHOUSE FUNERAL SET FOR TOMORROW
Elias Olinghouse, the late pioneer Nevadan for whom the Olinghouse mining district is named, will be buried tomorrow at Wadsworth and interment at Wadsworth will follow. [?] Mrs. Charles Babbs, his niece, and her husband will accompany the body from Groesbeck and O'Brien funeral parlors to Wadsworth tomorrow morning, the funer being set for the afternoon.
1913 December 9- Reno Evening Gazette

More recent history of the Olinghouse area can be found on the Great Basin Minerals web site where it says, "With the advent of bulk-mineable heap leaching came renewed interest in the hard-rock potential of the district. Phelps Dodge was unable to find sufficient reserves in 1997, and so the property was picked up by Alta Gold Company, which quickly brought it into production. In 1999-2000, while Alta Gold was actively mining in the district, nearly all of the known fine crystallized wire and nest gold specimens were recovered and distributed. In April 2000, after about 30,000 ounces of gold production, Alta Gold went bankrupt, and, with only a few hours' notice, Olinghouse operations permanently shut down. This was primarily because of the low price of gold and spotty production. The properties reverted back to the bank that was holding Alta's operational loan. When the bank couldn't sell all the properties, they reverted back to the former owners, who are now engaged in long-term, multiple civil court battles to see who will control the choicest tracts. It is uncertain if another adventurous mining company will try to work Olinghouse once more and if any specimens will be preserved.

Fort Defiance

Couldn't find much information regarding "Fort

Defiance," not to be confused with similarly-named places in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Ohio, and other places-- or the epic 1951 western starring Dane Clark, Ben Johnson, Peter Graves, and Iron Eyes Cody. It is not mentioned in the Nevada Historical Society Quarterly Vol. VII No. 3-4 article on *Early Nevada Forts* by Colonel George Ruhlen. Information we did locate indicates it was, most likely, a fortification erected by miners during the Paiute Troubles of 1860 and likely not a "true" military installation. It is not shown on the 1877 Wheeler Survey. Its location is clearly marked on a survey map of 1911. It is also prominently marked on an investment company's map of 1905 as "Old Fort Defiance." Ditto on early State highway maps from 1919.

The Wadsworth Dispatch of 26 November 1896 mentions that it was built by miners. Information recorded in the 1960's mentions an old wall or earthworks was still visible at that time. A story in the *Gold Hill News* of 17 March, 1865, mentions the fort. Thanks to the chillingly beautiful Karalea Clough, Library Technician at the Nevada Historical Society for that.

The Fort Defiance area is used for grazing. The BLM says:

Fort Defiance [grazing] enclosure, located at T. 21 N., R. 23 E., Section 8, with parts of it overlapping into Sections 7 and 17, was built around 2001 to protect the riparian areas from trampling and overgrazing, as well as to improve the condition of the springs and creeks. From as early as 2001 to the present, this enclosure has been officially closed to grazing, due to the fact that the riparian areas have not been in PFC; however, cattle have either been allowed into the enclosure by the permittee(s) or the general public, or recreationists have left gates open, resulting in unauthorized cattle use. This has resulted in severe use of the riparian areas within the enclosure, to include grazing and trampling

It also confirms the origination of the fort itself:

To date, in and immediately adjacent to the BLM-managed lands of the White Hills Allotment, known cultural resources represent significant past human use of the landscape. Known cultural resources within the White Hills Allotment are predominantly related to mining and include historical mining camps, prospects, mining complexes, residential areas, and transportation sites including roads and trails; ranching features; debris scatters; and the site of Fort Defiance, a small fortification erected by miners during the Pyramid Lake Paiute Indian War in 1860. Prehistoric-period resources include lithic scatters that represent both small task sites and larger camp areas.

POST OFFICE

June 28, 1898 - October 31, 1902 (Ora)
October 1, 1903 - July 31, 1923

NEWSPAPER

WHAT IS

Despite the rumors and reports of armed hillbillies guarding access to the town, Olinghouse is deserted. There are many many "No Trespassing" signs so just stay on the road and you'll be fine. The local mine company has blocked access to the

mine works, and they have also fenced off their HQ and yard in the center of town. There are plenty of ruins around to look at.

North of Olinghouse in Jones Canyon is the remains of a old ranch and a substantial dam. The pond has a lot of water this year and actually covers the road so don't accidentally drive into it.

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