

W. J. “Jeff” Williams

W. J. “Jeff” Williams was an early Hale County resident, a longtime county surveyor, and an inventor. He was born in Johnson County in 1881, and his family moved to the Prairieview Community east of Plainview in 1886. He attended a one-room school for all ages and all subjects, and when the school lost its teacher, he became the replacement teacher at age 18 because he scored higher than the other older students on a test they were given. At the age of 21 he was elected Hale County Surveyor.

Though he never formally graduated from high school, Williams received a thorough education in surveying from the famous surveyor Willis Day Twichell, who was living in Amarillo and carrying out extensive surveys for railroads and other clients. Williams moved there for his training and was elected Potter County Surveyor in 1907, a post he held for eight years. He was also a part owner of the Amarillo Daily News from 1910 to 1916.

Williams returned to Plainview in 1916 and was again elected Hale County Surveyor in 1920, a post he held until his death in 1973. He invented what may have been the first wind-powered electrical charger. In the mid-1920s he wrote a letter to the famous scientist Albert A. Michelson, who was engaged in measuring the speed of light, to ask whether his method could be adapted to measure land — something that is actually done today.

In 1906 he married Ethyl Williams — same last name, but no relation — who was from the Oklahoma Territory and had been one of his students. They had four children.

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