

On his return trip back to North Bend on the ferry, a strong storm had come up, but the ride across the bay from the Glasgow side was uneventful. As he was driving his car from the ferry slip at North Bend through Simpson Park, a tree uprooted, struck his car and killed him instantly. The county court immediately appointed his wife Martha to assume the duties of County Superintendent.

Mrs. Martha Mulkey (married Bruce Purdy in 1946) was also a very dedicated educator. Before taking the reins of Coos County School Superintendent, she taught school for eight years in the Coquille District at the Washington School. Mrs. (Mulkey) Purdy held the position of County Superintendent for 27 and a half years until she retired in 1952. On January 6, 1953, *The Coos Bay Times* carried the following article about her retirement:



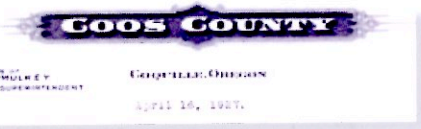
Martha Mulkey, 1950.
Courtesy of Paul Farr

The numerous rural schools that have been closed during Mrs. Purdy's term of office may be remembered fondly by many former pupils and with a spirit of community pride. Mrs. Purdy did not like to see tradition and history ended with the permanent sealing of the doors of a rural school, but she realized that by utilizing modern transportation, larger schools could provide a wider range of educational advantages than the limited offerings of the one-room rural school. It was to this end that she worked – bigger schools, better programs, and better trained teachers. She worked for what she believed to be right, and we feel that Coos County has gained much from her years of unselfish service...

Undoubtedly Mrs. Purdy had more experience handling parents in the rural areas during the difficult times of merging school districts than any superintendent before her time or after. Her first consolidation occurred in 1927 when the Myrtle Point and Pleasant View School Districts were combined. In 1925, there were 76 school districts in the County. When she retired in 1953 the number had shrunk to 25.

The elimination of 51 school districts required her to manage 60 consolidation ordeals. To appease opponents, she often promised that the rural districts could retain their school facilities because of the unsafe travel conditions on these rural country roads. This common argument began to fade after the county began improving the roads into the back country.

About the time that Martha Mulkey took over the Coos County Superintendent post, the legislature passed a new law that gave the superintendent the added duty to supervise the physical examination of elementary school students to discover problems of vision, hearing or the existence of "external obvious defects". Throughout this book, references are frequently made about Mrs. Mulkey visiting a rural school with the county school nurse in tow – precisely to evaluate the health of the young students.



Letterhead for Coos County School Superintendent Martha Mulkey. Courtesy of Gary Gunnell