

## CHAPTER 171

## UNCLAIMED PROPERTY

## SUBCHAPTER I

## PROPERTY IN POSSESSION OF A CONSIGNEE OR BAILEE

171 01	Duty of consignee or bailee
171 02	Disposition of proceeds
171 03	Officers' fees
171 04	Perishable property, held for carriage or storage, how disposed of
171 05	Perishable property, held otherwise, how disposed of
171 06	Unclaimed property, how disposed of

171 07	Common carriers, lien for transportation
171 08	Restored to donors or applied to charity

## SUBCHAPTER II

## PROPERTY IN POSSESSION OF A MUSEUM OR ARCHIVES

171 30	Definitions
171 31	Loans of property to a museum or archives
171 32	Acquiring title to abandoned property
171 33	Acquiring title to undocumented property

## SUBCHAPTER I

PROPERTY IN POSSESSION OF A  
CONSIGNEE OR BAILEE

**171.01 Duty of consignee or bailee.** Whenever any personal property shall be consigned to or deposited with any common carrier, forwarding merchant, wharfinger, warehouse keeper, innkeeper or the keeper of any depot for the storage of baggage, merchandise or other personal property, such consignee or bailee shall immediately cause to be entered in a proper book kept by the consignee or bailee a description of such property with the date of the reception thereof; and if the same shall not have been so consigned or deposited for the purpose of being forwarded or disposed of according to directions received by such consignee or bailee at or before his or her reception thereof the consignee or bailee shall immediately notify the owner by mail thereof, if the owner's name and residence be known or can with reasonable diligence be ascertained.

History: 1983 a 500 s 43; 1993 a 482.

**171.02 Disposition of proceeds.** If the owner of the property sold or the owner's legal representatives shall, at any time within five years after such money shall have been deposited in the county treasury, furnish satisfactory evidence to the treasurer of the ownership of such property the owner or the owner's legal representatives shall be entitled to receive from such treasurer the amount so deposited with the treasurer. If not claimed within said time by the owner or the owner's legal representatives the same shall belong to the county.

History: 1993 a 482.

**171.03 Officers' fees.** The fees allowed under this subchapter to any sheriff or constable are the same fees allowed by law to a sheriff for sales upon execution.

History: 1993 a 18.

**171.04 Perishable property, held for carriage or storage, how disposed of.** (1) If any property delivered to any forwarding merchant, wharfinger or warehouse keeper, for carriage or storage, is in a state of decay or manifestly liable to immediate damage and decay, the person in whose custody the property is, the person's agent or attorney, may make an affidavit of this fact, and present the affidavit to a circuit judge or court commissioner for the county in which the property is located, and the circuit judge or court commissioner shall immediately make an order requiring the sheriff or any constable of the county to immediately inspect the property, and directing him or her, if it is found to be in a state of decay or manifestly liable to immediate damage or decay, to summarily sell the property without notice.

(2) If the sheriff or constable, upon inspection, finds the property to be in a state of decay, or manifestly liable to immediate damage or decay, the sheriff or constable shall attach to the order his or her affidavit stating such fact, and shall make an inventory

of the property, and shall summarily sell the property without notice, and shall make full return of the sheriff's or constable's execution of the order to the judge or commissioner who issued the same, together with the sheriff's or constable's affidavit, inventory and the proceeds of said sale, after deducting the sheriff's or constable's fees therefrom.

(3) From the proceeds of such sale, the judge or commissioner shall pay all legal charges that have been incurred in relation to the property, or a ratable proportion of each charge if the proceeds of the sale are not sufficient to pay all the charges; and the balance, if any, the judge or commissioner shall immediately pay over to the treasurer of the judge's or commissioner's county, with a copy of all the proceedings in the matter. The county treasurer shall file the copy in his or her office.

(4) The person in whose custody such property shall be when any such proceeding for the sale thereof shall be commenced, shall immediately notify the consignor and consignee of such sale, which notice shall be in writing, and shall be served by leaving a copy thereof with the consignor and consignee, personally or by mail.

History: 1977 c. 449; 1993 a 482.

**171.05 Perishable property, held otherwise, how disposed of.** If any property is perishable or subject to decay by keeping, the person in whose custody the property is, the person's agent or attorney, may make an affidavit of this fact and present the affidavit to a circuit judge or court commissioner for the county in which the property is located, and the judge or court commissioner shall immediately make an order requiring the sheriff or any constable of the county to immediately inspect the property, and if it is found to be perishable or subject to decay by keeping, to make and return an affidavit of this fact. Upon the return of this affidavit, the judge or commissioner making the order shall immediately issue an order requiring the sheriff or constable to sell the property at public auction, giving notice of the time and place of the sale by publication of a class 1 notice, under ch. 985, and serving upon the consignor, the consignee and the custodian of the property, if they are known, a copy of the notice by mail. The sheriff or constable shall, at the time and place fixed by the notice, unless the property has been otherwise lawfully disposed of, sell the property at public auction, and shall make full return of his or her execution of the order, and return the same with an inventory of the property and the proceeds of the sale, after deducting his or her fees, to the judge or commissioner making the order. From the proceeds of the sale, the judge or commissioner shall pay all legal charges that have been incurred in relation to the property, or a ratable proportion of each charge, if the proceeds of the sale are not sufficient to pay all the charges; and the balance, if any, the judge or court commissioner shall immediately pay over to the treasurer of the county, with a copy of all the proceedings in the matter. The county treasurer shall file the copy in his or her office. The person in whose custody the property is when the proceedings for the sale were commenced, shall immediately notify the consignor and consignee of the sale, in writing which

shall be served by leaving a copy with the consignor and consignee personally or by mail.

History: 1977 c. 449.

**171.06 Unclaimed property, how disposed of.** When any property is not perishable or subject to decay and is not claimed and taken away within one year after it was received, it may be sold as follows: The person in whose custody the property is, or the person's agent or attorney, may make an affidavit of the facts and present the same to a judge or court commissioner of the county in which the property is located and such judge or court commissioner shall immediately issue an order requiring the sheriff or any constable of the county to sell the property at public auction, giving 60 days' notice of the time and place of the sale to the consignor, the consignee and the custodian of the property. This notice shall be in writing and served personally or by mail upon the persons whose names and residences are known. If the name or residence of any of the persons is unknown and cannot be ascertained with reasonable diligence, the sheriff or constable shall make an affidavit of this fact and shall publish a class 3 notice, under ch. 985, in the county. At the time and place of the sale the sheriff or constable shall sell the property at public auction and shall make a full return of the sheriff's or constable's proceedings under the order to the judge or commissioner issuing the order, together with proof of service or publication of the notice of the sale, and an inventory of the property sold and the proceeds of the sale after deducting the sheriff's or constable's fees. From the proceeds of the sale the judge or commissioner shall pay all legal charges that have been incurred in relation to the property, including the charges of the person in whose custody the property was when the proceedings were begun, or a ratable proportion of each charge if the proceeds of the sale are not sufficient to pay all the charges; and the balance, if any, the judge or commissioner shall immediately pay over to the treasurer of his or her county, with a copy of all proceedings in the matter. The county treasurer shall file the copy in his or her office. The person in whose custody the property is when any proceeding for the sale is commenced, shall immediately notify the consignor and consignee of the sale, in writing, and served by leaving a copy thereof with the consignor and consignee, personally or by mail.

History: 1993 a. 482.

**171.07 Common carriers, lien for transportation.**

(1) Any property transported or stored with, or left with any common carrier, including property checked in any check room or parcel locker maintained upon the premises of such carrier, shall be subject to a lien for the lawful charges thereon for the transportation and storage thereof.

(2) (a) If any property not perishable in its nature shall be permitted to remain in the possession of a common carrier, unclaimed or refused, for a period of 60 days, with the lawful charges thereon due and unpaid, such common carrier may proceed to sell the same at public auction at its station at the destination of the shipment, or point of storage or checking of said property, after mailing at least 10 days' notice by United States mail of the amount of the charges to the consignor and consignee, if it be property transported by it, and to the owner if it be property stored or checked by it, if their whereabouts are known, or if their whereabouts be unknown, then as to property transported, to the consignor at the originating point of the shipment and to the consignee at the destination of the shipment, and in addition thereto posting, at its station, in a conspicuous place accessible to the public, for a period of not less than 10 days, a notice of the time and place of the proposed sale. Said notice shall contain a description of the property to be sold, if known, and if not, a description of the package in which it is contained, the amount of charges thereon and the name of the consignee and consignor thereof, or the owner thereof, if known; provided, if there is no satisfactory bid at such auction sale, the common carrier may remove the property to some other city, village or town of not less than 5,000 inhabitants within the state and there proceed to sell the same at public auction after giv-

ing additional notice by mailing and posting as provided in this paragraph.

(b) If any property not perishable in its nature shall be left upon any vehicle or upon the premises of any common carrier, other than by storing or checking the same, said common carrier shall store the same subject to the order of the owner thereof, and, if the same be unclaimed for a period of 60 days, such common carrier may proceed to sell the same at public auction in the manner and upon notice as specified in par. (a).

(3) Fruit, fresh fish, oysters, game and other perishable property after having been retained for 24 hours after notice to consignee, if the consignee be known, may be sold, either at public or private sale in the discretion of the common carrier for the highest price that the same will bring.

(4) After the lawful charges of the common carrier for transportation and storage for the period of compulsory retention shall be deducted from the proceeds of the sale, the overplus, if any, shall be held by the common carrier subject to the order of the owner, and, at any time within 12 months after such sale, upon the demand of the owner, the common carrier shall pay the same to the owner.

History: 1993 a. 246, 482, 491.

**171.08 Restored to donors or applied to charity.**

Whenever, upon the occurrence of a cyclone, conflagration or like calamity, 5 or more persons contribute moneys to a common fund for the relief of the sufferers by such calamity the surplus money, if exceeding \$25 in amount, remaining unexpended for such purpose in the hands of any person authorized to receive and disburse the money after the expiration of 6 months from the date of the calamity shall be disposed of as provided in this section. Within 10 days after the expiration of such 6 months the person having possession of the surplus shall make and cause to be published a complete itemized statement of all moneys paid into the fund, all disbursements therefrom and the amount of the unexpended balance. The publication shall be made as a class 1 notice, under ch. 985, in the town, city or village wherein the calamity occurred. There shall be annexed to and published with such statement a notice, signed by the person having possession of the surplus, to the effect that the person will pay to each of the contributors to such fund a proportional share of the surplus at a place named in the notice, after deducting expenses of publishing the notice, if payment thereof is duly demanded within 60 days from the date of the publication of the notice, and that after the expiration of the period all moneys not so returned to contributors will be donated to one or more charities to be named in the notice. Within 5 days after the expiration of the 60 days the person having the surplus in his or her possession shall deliver it to the charity or one or more of the charities mentioned in the notice, and on delivery of the surplus and the filing of a receipt therefor, with an affidavit of the publication and mailing of the notice and statement, in the office of the clerk of the county in which the calamity occurred, shall not thereafter be liable or accountable therefor to the contributors of the fund, any portion of them or any other person.

History: 1979 c. 110.

SUBCHAPTER II

PROPERTY IN POSSESSION OF  
A MUSEUM OR ARCHIVES

**171.30 Definitions.** In this subchapter:

(1) "Archives" means a nonprofit organization or a public agency whose primary functions include selecting, preserving and making available records of historical or enduring value, and that is open to the public on a regular basis. "Archives" does not include a public library.

(2) "Loan" means the placement of property with a museum or archives that is not accompanied by a transfer of title of the property to the museum or archives and for which there is some



archives becomes the owner of the property on the day after the period for submitting a written claim ends or on the day after the museum or archives determines that no valid timely written claim was submitted. The museum or archives owns the property free from all claims.

History: 1993 a 18

**171.33 Acquiring title to undocumented property.**

Property in the possession of a museum or archives which the

museum or archives has reason to believe is on loan and for which the museum or archives does not know the owner or have any reasonable means of determining the owner becomes the property of the museum or archives if no person has claimed the property within 7 years after the museum or archives took possession of the property. The museum or archives becomes the owner of the property on the day after the 7-year period ends, free from all claims.

History: 1993 a 18.