Insurance—Disappearance of Insured—Presumption as to Time of Death

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475, footnote 15, to the effect that in Michigan the rule is well established
that only under certain circumstances will a conditional vendor be entitled
to superiority. For instance, one requirement is that the chattel must be
removable without injury to the reality. It might be pointed out that the
Michigan view is expressive of but one line of cases on a disputed matter.
Other jurisdictions hold that the conditional vendor's right is inferior to
that of the mortgagee on the ground that a mortgagor of real estate cannot
affect the rights of the mortgagee by agreements with third persons for the
annexation of chattels to the reality; in other words, by agreements to which
he is not a party and has not consented. See 13 St. Louis L. Rev. 255; 37

INSURANCE—DISAPPEARANCE OF INSURED—PRESUMPTION AS TO TIME OF
DEATH.—Five years after the disappearance of one Marshall his policy of
life insurance expired. More than seven years after said disappearance,
Marshall's widow sued upon the policy, offering evidence to support an
inference of death within five years after the disappearance of her husband,
and so before the lapse of said policy. Held, the jury correctly found for
the plaintiff. Kansas City Life Insurance Co. v. Marshall (Colo., 1928),
268 P. 529.

The general rule is that a presumption of death arises from the con-
tinued and unexplained absence of a person from his home or place of resi-
dence without any intelligence concerning him for a period of seven years.
See 8 R. C. L. 708 and cases there cited.

The question arises, however, as to whether the time of death must be
presumed to have been only at the end of the seven years, or whether it
may be found to have been at an earlier time. On this proposition there
is a conflict of authority. The prevailing view seems to be that after
seven years of unexplained absence the law presumptively establishes not
only the fact of death, but also the time of death, the latter being regarded
as occurring on the last day of the seven year period if there is nothing
pointing directly to the contrary. Meyer v. Madreperla (1902), 68 N. J.

The English rule and that followed by a number of courts in this country
is that there is no presumption established as to the time of death. The
presumption is only that the person is dead at the end of seven years, but
the question of the particular time of death is left open to be judged by the
facts and circumstances of the case under consideration. This rule was
applied in the principal case. See 8 R. C. L. 711; note, 34 A. L. R. 1389;
Davis v. Briggs (1878), 97 U. S. 628.

To determine whether death occurred at some particular time before the
expiration of the seven-year period the courts following the latter view
refer the question to the jury. Consideration is given to such facts as the
following: the habits, attachments, domestic and financial circumstances of
the absentee; any circumstances indicating accident or exposure to specific
peril; evidence of sickness; indications pointing to suicide; evidence of a
prospective journey and the dangers incident thereto; in short, anything

tending to furnish a basis for inferring a death before the seven-year period

established by law. A full discussion of these matters can be found in an

annotation to Goodier v. Mutual Life Insurance Co. (1924), 158 Minn. 1,

196 N. W. 662, 34 A. L. R. 1383. Also see 8 R. C. L. 711 et seq.

The circumstances in Kansas City Life Insurance Co. v. Marshall justifying

the jury in finding that the deceased died before the expiration of his

policy, five years after his disappearance, were that the habits, character,

domestic relations, etc., of the deceased were such as to make the abandon-

ment of his home and family improbable. The evidence showed that al-

though he was financially involved, the extent was inconsiderable; that he

was a happy man, loving his family, and taking an interest in the future.

Just previous to his disappearance, he had phoned his sister’s residence

stating he was coming over, but was never heard from again. Any motive

for disappearing was altogether lacking. It is submitted that the case is

correctly decided, not only on the particular facts, but also in adopting the

English rule. For a very similar case, see Springmeyer v. Sovereign Camp,

W. W. (1912), 163 Mo. A. 338, 143 S. W. 872, treated briefly in 34 A. L. R.

1389, 1394.


MASTER AND SERVANT—Missouri Workmen’s Compensation Law—

Claim for Injuries Received Outside of State.—In contract of employ-

ment entered into in Missouri contemplating travel in other states, both

employer and employee accepted the provisions of the Missouri Work-

men’s Compensation Act which by Section 12 (Laws 1927, p. 498) extends

to injuries received outside of Missouri. The employee was injured in

Oklahoma and brought an action to recover the stipulated compensation.

The employer contended that Section 12 was void in that it purported to

create an extraterritorial cause of action, and hence that the Missouri

Workmen’s Compensation Commission had no jurisdiction of the cause.

Held, that Section 12 is valid, that the Missouri act governs the case, and

that the commission has jurisdiction. State v. Missouri Workmen’s Com-

pensation Commission (Mo. A. 1928), 8 S. W. (2d) 897.

The cause of action in this case, the court points out, accrued not from

the commission of a tort in Oklahoma, but through the breach of a con-

tractual obligation which was entered into in Missouri and which was to be

performed in Missouri. The breach consisted of relator’s refusal to pay

the stipulated compensation. The court cites Crane v. Leonard et al. (1921),

214 Mich. 218, 183 N. W. 204, 18 A. L. R. 285. The decision of this case

and the annotation in 18 A. L. R. review many authorities, the essential

points developed being as follows: Workmen’s compensation acts are in

general of two types: (1) compulsory, imposing on the employer a statu-

tory liability; (2) optional, imposing liability under the act only where

both the employer and employee expressly or impliedly agree to be bound

by its terms. This distinction is of cardinal importance, particularly as

affecting their “extraterritorial operation.”

Under the compulsory type of statute, the rule is that there is no con-