April 2003

Cases of Note -- Copyright -- Term Extension Passes Supreme Court

Bruce Strauch

The Citadel, strauchk@earthlink.net

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Recommended Citation

Strauch, Bruce (2003) "Cases of Note -- Copyright -- Term Extension Passes Supreme Court," Against the Grain: Vol. 15: Iss. 2, Article 28.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4038

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
other counter-offer. Until Langetown and Lake University both agree on the price and the terrs, no contract has been formed.

Another important requirement for a contract is “consideration.” Consideration consists of both parties giving up something that they are not required to give up, or doing something that they do not need to do. For example, Sally’s agreement to pay $35 constitutes consideration. Bob’s agreement to give up his stereo constitutes consideration. In employment contracts, the organization agrees to pay money, and the employee agrees to perform work. These actions constitute consideration.

In order for a contract to be formed, there must be consideration on the part of both parties. This is why a mere promise is not enforceable as a contract. For example, suppose that Bob tells Sally he will give her a stereo for her birthday. He does not ask for money from Sally. Since there is only consideration on one side, no contract has been formed. If Bob doesn’t give Sally a stereo, she can’t take him to court to obtain the stereo.

To illustrate the difference between entering negotiations and forming a contract, let’s take a look at the following example. Let us assume that we have two libraries in adjacent communities, the Greentown Public Library and the Langetown Public Library. Both libraries decide to build new branches. Let us assume that the two towns have different bidding rules, so that Greentown is required to use an RFP and award contracts to the lowest bidder, while Langetown is allowed to enter into direct negotiations with any vendor on its pre-qualified list. (I am assuming that both libraries complied with all applicable rules and regulations, and that everything was done correctly.)

Greentown uses an RFP that specifies what type of work the library wants to have done and that details the requirements the library has for its new building. The lowest bidder is the XYZ Construction Corporation. One of the provisions in the XYZ bid specifies that even if the project is canceled for any reason whatsoever, Greentown will still have to pay 10% of the contract price. The director of the Greentown Public Library tells XYZ that the board will take 10 days to consider the document.

Langetown also wants to build a new branch, but it selects the contractor differently. Since Langetown has worked with XYZ Construction Corporation in the past, the library’s leaders go directly to XYZ. They know exactly what they want and how much they want to spend, and so they create a document specifying that XYZ will build the branch within certain specifications, and for a particular price. The document specifies that even if the project is canceled for any reason whatsoever, Langetown will still have to pay 10% of the contract price. Langetown signs the document, and so does XYZ Corporation.

Five days later, the state decides to cut the budget for local libraries. Both Greentown and Langetown are affected by the cuts, and are forced to cancel their branch-building projects. XYZ sees both Greentown and Langetown for 10% of the contract price, despite the fact that no work has been done and the contractor has spent no money. Who wins?

Because the two libraries used very different bidding procedures, the results would be very different. A “Request for Proposal” is exactly that—a request that the contractor enter into negotiations with the library. As such, the RFP does not constitute an offer that XYZ can accept. Instead, the proposal by XYZ was an offer that Greentown had not yet accepted. Therefore, there was no contract. Greentown would win, and XYZ would not be successful in its lawsuit.

Langetown, on the other hand, proposed that XYZ build a branch for a specific price. There were details as to the way in which the branch was to be constructed. Both the library and XYZ signed the document after it was presented to the contractor. The library made an offer to XYZ, and XYZ accepted its offer. As a result, a contract was formed. Therefore, XYZ will win its lawsuit, and the library will have to pay 10% of the construction fee as a penalty for not fulfilling the contract.

Endnotes
3. Am Jur 2d at 26, quoting Baehe v. Penn-O-Tex Oil Corp., 258 Minn. 333, 104 N.W.2d 661.

Copyright — Term Extension Passes Supreme Court


Petitioners were not pleased with the Copyright Term Extension Act (CTEA) which in 1998 tackled twenty years to both existing and future copyrights. Pub. L. 105-298, § 102(b) & (d), 112 Stat. 2827-2828 (amending 17 U.S.C. §§ 302, 304).

Petitioners had to concede that attacking the new life-plus-70 as going beyond “a limited time” would be an exercise in illogic. "Whether 50 years is enough, or 70 years too much is not a judgment meet for this Court." Brief for Petitioners 14 n.1.

Instead they attacked the extension of the existing copyrights.

Ruth Ginsburg’s clerks, writing for the Court, led off with the usual boilerplate of the Patent Clause of the Constitution, Art. I, §8, cl. 8, with says re copyrights: Congress shall have Power... to promote the Progress of Science... by securing [to Authors] for limited Times... the exclusive Right to their... Writings.

Then cited the 14-year term of the first copyright statute of 1790 noting that it applied to both existing works and those not yet published. Act of May 31, 1790, ch. 15 §1 1 Stat. 124 (1790 Act).

Then still in the same paragraph noted the 1831 extension to 42 years and the 1909 extension to 56 years each time applied to existing and future works.
Cases of Note  
from page 76

Yes, it was all over with in one paragraph although the Court took 26 more Lexis pages to wind up.

The 1976 Act altered the timeline from the date of publication of the prior acts to the date of the work's creation giving protection from that moment to 50 years after the author's death. This was done to get us aligned with the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, a then-dominant international standard.

Anonymous, pseudonymous, and works for hire got 75 years from publication or 100 years from creation, whichever came first. 1976 Act § 302(c).

CEA now harmonizes with the European Union with a term of 70 years after author's death. 17 U.S.C. § 302(a). And for those anonymous et al. works 95 years from publication or 100 years from creation whenever comes first. Id. § 302(c).

And your author will note with a bit of misgiving there will in the future be an awful lot of "harmonizing" with the EU regulations — the demand for which is the power that France (Le EU c'est moi) sees as its counterweight to American frontier free-market crude oil and the inability of primitives from Paris, Kentucky, to read a French menu.

So, when is 70 years a limited time?

Petitioners argued that a time once fixed became forever fixed or else it wouldn’t be "limited."

Which is not illogical. Continuous expansion at the whim of Congress means there is no fixed period that can be relitigated upon by publishers who want to print things in the public domain.


And dodging the logic bullet ...

"[A] page of history is worth a volume of logic." New York Trust Co. v. Eisner, 256 U.S. 345, 349 (1921). Congress has historically granted the extension to existing copyright holders from the very first Act. The English Statute of Anne, 1710, provided copyright protection to books already composed and published as well as those not yet published.

And in some more neat history, Justice Stevens, who dissented every step of the way, noted the British Parliament rejected an amendment to the Statute of Anne that would have extended existing copyrights out of fear of a monopoly by English book-sellers. This, however, was unique to England and until 1695 the Stationers' Company — an ancient London guild of printers and booksellers — held a government sanctioned printing monopoly. M. Rose, Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright 4 (1993).

There was no parallel in the U.S. where competition among printers, booksellers and publishers was fierce. The framers protected against the remember. British situation by authorizing Congress to grant copyright only to authors.

But swinging around to address logic ...

"Justice, policy, and equity alike forbid [that an] author [who had sold his work] a week ago, be placed in a worse situation than the author who should sell his work the day after the passing of [the act]." 7 Cong. Deb. 424 (1831); accord Symposium, The Constitutionality of Copyright Term Extension, 18 Cardozo Arts & Ent. L.J. 651, 694 (2000) (Prof. Miller).

Now, Rational Exercise of Legislative Authority, vel non? I always wanted to say "vel non" in law class, but never had the nerve.

"It is Congress that has been assigned the task of defining the scope of the limited monopoly that should be granted to authors ... in order to give the public appropriate access to their work." Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios, Inc., 464 U.S. 417, 429 (1984).

That other dissent, Justice Breyer, wanted a three-part test of constitutionality in copyright extension, and thank goodness the majority rejected that. Whatever you think of the result, the last thing we need is another of those infernal three-prong deals.

Congress is in the business of making judgments like this and was concerned that disunity with the EU would leave us out in the cold. Europe was taking life plus 70 for its authors, and if we didn't grant the same our authors wouldn't get it for our copyrights in the EU.

The Court cited Purlott, Participation in the International Copyright System as a Means to Promote the Progress of Science and Useful Arts, 36 Loyola (L.A.) L. Rev. 323, 330 (2002) saying: "Matching the level of [copyright] protection in the United States [to that in the EU] could ensure stronger protection for U.S. works abroad and avoid competitive disadvantages vis-a-vis foreign rightholders."

Which of course we can read as protecting Euro Disney's right to Mickey Mouse because Steamboat Willy was about to drop into the public domain with a resonading KER-SPASH that would ripple through the entire Disney Brand.

The Songwriters Guild, not wishing to be bound by the "limited times" of that silly old in-the-way Constitution, wanted perpetual copyright after all. But leaving that debate aside, Congress just went along with Europe. (If they stuck their head in an oven would we ... ?)

Really Transparent Justifications for Shameless Pandering to Special Interests

Congress also noted increased longevity and the tendency of parents to have kids later in life. Authors would be encouraged to write more if they thought their children could be rewarded during the kids' lifetime: 141 Cong. Rec. 6553 (1995).

Does this statistically hold true among writers and artists or just among yuppie power couples? Sue Britney Spears still claims she's a virgin at age 21, but Kurt Cobain had his kid pretty early. And anyhow, no one suggested a sliding scale of copyright term based on when artists had their kids. And, of course, no one would ever suggest rock stars quit paying to stuff cocaine up their noses and put the money in a trust fund.

Congress also cited a greatly increased commercial life of copyrighted works due to the explosion in media technology. By which Congress seems to be Freudian slipping into an admission that copyright should last as long as a work is exploitable by the nugas who slapped them the campaign bucks. Which means around 2018 you can look for another extension.

With some wisdom, Justice Breyer said he couldn't figure how this would motivate artists. But the Court said Congress makes up its own mind. And anyhow Congress had heard from a whole roster of "artists" on the motivation subject: Quincy Jones, Bob Dylan, Carlos Santana, and Don "The Eagles" Henley.

Which strikes me as coo as useful as asking Sonny Bono via ouija board if copyright extension would have made him feel more secure about Chastity's future and held his marriage together with Cher.

And the critics of the extension are really proved that these hearings were done in stealth long before the opponents of CESA knew what was coming down the pike.

And Congress brought in the Register of Copyrights, Marybeth Peters, to say authors needed additional income to live on while creating new works. The Court agreed with this, noting that Noah Webster and his family lived off the earnings of his speller and grammar while he was laboring twenty years over a dictionary.

Am I missing something here? Noah was alive. Under the modern rule of life-plus, copyright extension would have had no effect on his speller income.

Petitioners said Congress could just keep on extending copyright until it became unlimited or perpetual. The majority said this extension did not "cross a constitutionally significant threshold" but of course they weren't about to explain what that means. But the gist is Congress isn't doing this every week so it's not moving toward a perpetual copyright.

At least too rapidly.

Some Really Weak Arguments By Petitioners


Yes, I'm scratching my head over that one too.

Then they said extending the term doesn't "promote the Progress of Science" by stimulating new works, but merely adds value to existing...
Questions & Answers
Copyright Column

Column Editor: Laura N. Gasaway (Director of the Law Library & Professor of Law, University of North Carolina, CB #3385, Chapel Hill, NC 27599. Phone: 919-962-1321. Fax: 919-962-1193) <laura_gasaway@unc.edu> www.unc.edu/~uncing/gasaway.htm

QUESTION: When shareware or freeware has been downloaded from the Internet, is it copyright infringement to "beam it" to a colleague's Palm Pilot?

ANSWER: There is a difference between shareware and freeware which is pretty important in this instance. Freeware generally means that it is free of charge and free of restrictions on the use of the software. Therefore, duplicating a copy to someone's Palm Pilot would not be infringement. There is a possibility, however, that there are restrictions included in some click-on license agreement that accompanied the software on the Web. Further, the terms "freeware" and "software" are often used interchangeably even though there is a difference.

Traditionally, shareware means that the software is protected by copyright but that the software owner makes it available for you to examine. If you decide to use the software, then you are supposed to pay for the copy. Sending a copy of this software to someone violates the copyright holder's reproduction right. The most important thing, however, is to pay attention to any online license when you download the software.

QUESTION: When filling an interlibrary loan request, what information regarding copyright does the lending library need to include?

ANSWER: Under section 108 of the Copyright Act, every copy reproduced, under any of the sections, must include the notice of copyright contained on the work as detailed in section 108(a)(3). This provision was amended by the Digital Millennium Copyright Act to add language about what a library does when the work being reproduced does not contain the notice of copyright.

QUESTION: What are the pros and cons of a blanket license from the Copyright Clearance Center for a non-educational but non-profit organization?

ANSWER: The benefits of a CCC blanket license is that all in-house copying from library materials covered under the license is protected. It eliminates the necessity of keeping records for per-transaction copying on which royalties are due. Another benefit is that tables of contents services, where the library reproduces copies of the tables of contents from publications and distributes them within the organization, are exempted. The organization no longer has to seek permission from individual copyright holders. The only negative is that the library may not then rely on fair use for copying since a percentage of fair use copying is already included in the license.

continued on page 79