

Chapter 152.

Coroners.

§ 152-1. Election; vacancies in office; appointment by clerk in special cases.

In each county a coroner shall be elected by the qualified voters thereof in the same manner and at the same time as the election of members of the General Assembly, and shall hold office for a term of four years, or until his successor is elected and qualified.

A vacancy in the office of coroner shall be filled by the county commissioners, and the person so appointed shall, upon qualification, hold office until his successor is elected and qualified. If the coroner were elected as the nominee of a political party, then the county commissioners shall consult with the county executive committee of that political party before filling the vacancy, and shall appoint the person recommended by that committee if the party makes a recommendation within 30 days of the occurrence of the vacancy; this sentence shall apply only to the counties of Alamance, Alleghany, Avery, Beaufort, Brunswick, Buncombe, Burke, Cabarrus, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Davidson, Davie, Graham, Guilford, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Moore, New Hanover, Polk, Randolph, Rockingham, Rutherford, Stanly, Stokes, Transylvania, Wake, and Yancey.

When the coroner shall be out of the county, or shall for any reason be unable to hold the necessary inquest as provided by law, or there is a vacancy existing in the office of coroner which has not been filled by the county commissioners and it is made to appear to the clerk of the superior court by satisfactory evidence that a deceased person whose body has been found within the county probably came to his death by the criminal act or default of some person, it is the duty of the clerk to appoint some suitable person to act as coroner in such special case. (Const., art. 4, s. 24; 1903, c. 661; Rev., ss. 1047, 1049; C.S., ss. 1014, 1018; Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65; 1935, c. 376; 1981, c. 504, s. 8; c. 763, s. 5; c. 830.)

§ 152-2. Oaths to be taken.

Every coroner, before entering upon the duties of his office, shall take and subscribe to the oaths prescribed for public officers, and an oath of office. (Code, s. 661; Rev., s. 1048; C.S., s. 1015; Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65.)

§ 152-3. Coroner's bond.

Every coroner shall execute an undertaking conditioned upon the faithful discharge of the duties of his office with good and sufficient surety in the penal sum of two thousand dollars (\$2,000), payable to the State of North Carolina, and approved by the board of county commissioners. (1791, c. 342, ss. 1, 2, P. R.; 1820, c. 1047, ss. 1, 2, P. R.; R. C., c. 25, s. 2; Code, s. 661; 1899, c. 54, s. 52; Rev., s. 299; C.S., s. 1016; Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65.)

§ 152-4. Coroners' bonds registered; certified copies evidence.

All official bonds of coroners shall be duly approved, certified, registered, and filed as sheriffs' bonds are required to be; and certified copies of the same duly certified by the register of deeds, with official seal attached, shall be received and read in evidence in the like cases and in like manner as such copies of sheriffs' bonds are now allowed to be read in evidence. (1860-1, c. 18; Code, s. 662; Rev., s. 300; C.S., s. 1017; Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65.)

§ 152-5. Fees of coroners.

Fees of coroners shall be the same as are or may be allowed sheriffs in similar cases:

For holding an inquest over a dead body, five dollars (\$5.00); if necessarily engaged more than one day, for each additional day, five dollars (\$5.00).

For burying a pauper over whom an inquest has been held, all necessary and actual expenses, to be approved by the board of county commissioners, and paid by the county. (Code, s. 3743; 1903, c. 781; Rev., s. 2775; C.S., s. 3905; 1967, c. 1154, s. 6.)

§ 152-6. Powers, penalties, and liabilities of special coroner.

The special coroner appointed under the provisions of G.S. 152-1 shall be invested with all the powers and duties conferred upon the several coroners in respect to holding inquests over deceased bodies, and shall be subject to the penalties and liabilities imposed on the said coroners. (1903, c. 661, s. 2; Rev., s. 1050; C.S., s. 1019; Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65.)

§ 152-7. Duties of coroners with respect to inquests and preliminary hearings.

The duties of the several coroners with respect to inquests and preliminary hearings shall be as follows:

- (1) Whenever it appears that the deceased probably came to his death by the criminal act or default of some person, he shall go to the place where the body of such deceased person is and make a careful investigation and inquiry as to when and by what means such deceased person came to his death and the name of the deceased, if to be found out, together with all the material circumstances attending his death, and shall make a complete record of such personal investigation: Provided, however, that the coroner shall not proceed to summon a jury as is hereinafter provided if he shall be satisfied from his personal investigation that the death of the said deceased was from natural causes, or that no person is blamable in any respect in connection with such death, and shall so find and make such finding in writing as a part of his report, giving the reason for such finding; unless an affidavit be filed with the coroner indicating blame in connection with the death of the deceased. A written report of said investigation shall be filed by the coroner with the medical examiner and the district attorney of the superior court.
- (2) To empanel a jury of six persons, under oath, to make further inquiry as to the circumstances of death and to call witnesses as necessary to determine the circumstances. The coroner shall order that the names of at least 15 persons be drawn from the jury box in accordance with the procedure in G.S. 9-5. The coroner shall examine the jurors appearing in obedience to the summons, and may excuse jurors for whom service would be an extreme hardship, who would be unable to remain impartial in determining the issues, or are otherwise disqualified to serve as jurors. If the remaining jurors are less than six in number, the coroner shall cause sufficient additional names to be drawn from the jury box and have them summoned, so as to obtain the immediate attendance of at least six qualified jurors. The first six qualified jurors constitute the inquest jury.

- (3) If it appears that the deceased was slain, or came to his death in such manner as to indicate any person or persons guilty of the crime in connection with the said death, then the said inquiry shall ascertain who was guilty, either as principal or accessory, or otherwise, if known; and the cause and manner of his death.
- (4) Whenever in such investigations, whether preliminary or before his jury, it shall appear to the coroner or to the jury that any person or persons are culpable in the matter of such death, he shall forthwith issue his warrant for such persons and cause the same to be brought before him and the inquiry shall proceed as in the case of preliminary hearings in the district court, and in case it appears to the said coroner and the jury that such persons are probably guilty of any crime in connection with the death of the deceased, then the said coroner shall commit such persons to jail, if it appears that such persons are probably guilty of a capital crime, and in case it appears that such persons are not probably guilty of a capital crime, but are probably guilty of a lesser crime, then such coroner is to have the power and authority to fix bail for such person or persons. All such persons as are found probably guilty in such hearing shall be delivered to the keeper of the common jail for such county by the sheriff or such other officer as may perform his duties at such hearings and committed to jail unless such persons have been allowed and given the bail fixed by such coroner.
- (5) As many persons as are found to be material witnesses in the matters involved in such inquiry and hearings, and are not culpable themselves shall be bound in recognizance with sufficient surety to appear at the next superior court to give evidence, and such as may default in giving such recognizance may be by such coroner committed to jail as is provided for State witnesses in other cases.
- (6) Immediately upon information of the death of a person within his county, under such circumstances as call for an investigation as provided in G.S. 130A-383, the coroner shall notify the district attorney of the superior court and the medical examiner.
- (7) If an inquest or preliminary hearing be ordered, to arrange for the examination of any and all witnesses including those who may be offered by the county medical examiner.
- (8) To permit counsel for the family of the deceased, the solicitor of his district, or anyone designated by him, and counsel for any accused person to be present and participate in such hearing and examine and cross-examine witnesses and, whenever a warrant shall have been issued for any accused person, such accused person shall be entitled to counsel and to a full and complete hearing.
- (9) To hold his inquiry where the body of the deceased shall be or at any other place in the county, and the body of the deceased need not be present at such hearing. The hearing may be adjourned to other times and places.
- (10) To reduce to writing all of the testimony of all witnesses, and to have each witness to sign his testimony in the presence of the coroner, who shall attest the same, and, upon direction of the district attorney of the district, all of the testimony heard by the coroner and his jury shall be taken stenographically, and expense of such taking, when approved by the coroner and the district attorney of the district, shall be paid by the county. When the testimony is taken by a stenographer, the witness shall be caused to sign the same after it has been

written out, and the coroner shall attest such signature. The attestation of all the signatures of witnesses who shall testify before the coroner shall include attaching his seal, and such statements, when so signed and attested, shall be received as competent evidence in all courts either for the purpose of contradiction or corroboration of witnesses who make the same, under the same rules as other evidence to contradict or corroborate may be now admitted. The coroner shall file a copy of all written testimony given at the hearing with the county medical examiner and with the district attorney of the superior court. (Code, s. 657; 1899, c. 478; 1905, c. 628; Rev., s. 1051; 1909, c. 707, s. 1; C.S., s. 1020; Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65; 1955, c. 972, s. 2; 1957, c. 503, ss. 1, 2; 1967, c. 1154, s. 6; 1973, c. 47, s. 2; c. 108, s. 92; c. 558; 2007-484, s. 11(d).)

§ 152-8. Acts as sheriff in certain cases; special coroner.

If at any time there is no person properly qualified to act as sheriff in any county, the coroner of such county is hereby required to execute all process and in all other things to act as sheriff, until some person is appointed sheriff in said county; and he shall be under the same rules and regulations, and subject to the same forfeitures, fines, and penalties as sheriffs are by law for neglect or disobedience of the same duties. If at any time the sheriff of any county is interested in or a party to any proceeding in any court, and there is no coroner in such county, or if the coroner is interested in any such proceeding, then the clerk of the court from which such process issues shall appoint some suitable person to act as special coroner to execute such process, and such special coroner shall be under the same rules, regulations, and penalties as hereinabove provided for. (Code, s. 658; 1891, c. 173; Rev., s. 1052; C.S., s. 1021; Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65.)

§ 152-9. Compensation of jurors at inquest.

All persons who may be summoned to act as jurors in any inquest held by a coroner over dead bodies, and who, in obedience thereto, appear and act as such jurors, shall be entitled to the same compensation in per diem and mileage as is allowed by law to jurors acting in the superior courts. The coroners of the respective counties are authorized and empowered to take proof of the number of days of service of each juror so acting, and also of the number of miles traveled by such juror in going to and returning from such place of inquest, and shall file with the board of commissioners of the county a correct account of the same, which shall be, by such commissioners, audited and paid in the manner provided for the pay of jurors acting in the superior courts. (Code, ss. 659, 660; Rev., s. 1053; C.S., s. 1022; Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65.)

§ 152-10. Hearing by coroner in lieu of other preliminary hearing; habeas corpus.

All hearings by a coroner and his jury, as provided herein, when the accused has been arrested and has participated in such hearing, shall be in lieu of any other preliminary hearing, and such cases shall be immediately sent to the clerk of the superior court of such county and docketed by him in the same manner as warrants from magistrates. Any accused person who shall be so committed by a coroner shall have the right, upon habeas corpus, to have a judge of the superior or district court review the action of the coroner in fixing bail or declining the same. (Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65; 1973, c. 108, s. 93.)

§ 152-11. Service of process issued by coroner.

All process, both subpoenas and warrants for the arrest of any person or persons, and orders for the summoning of a jury, in case it may appear necessary for such coroner to issue such order, shall be served by the sheriff or other lawful officer of the county in which such dead body is found, and in case it is necessary to subpoena witnesses or to arrest persons in a county other than such county in which the body of the deceased is found, then such coroner may issue his process to any other county in the State, with his official seal attached, and such process shall be served by the sheriff or other lawful officer of the county to which it is directed, but such process shall not be served outside of the county in which such dead body is found unless attested by the official seal of such coroner. (Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 65.)