

Mystery Box May Hold Hughes' Will

Los Angeles

The Los Angeles County Superior Court was informed yesterday of an extraordinary, worldwide hunt for a Howard Hughes will, including a Cinderella-like quest for a safe deposit box that matches a key discovered in the billionaire's effects here.

Many copies of the unidentified safety deposit box key have been made and are being circulated widely to banks in several states, sources close to the Hughes business empire told The Los Angeles Times.

The same sources said the key was found in an office here that was formerly used by Hughes and had been kept locked for years until after his death April 5.

A glimpse behind an "exhaustive worldwide search" for a Hughes will was given as the combined forces of distant relatives and close business associates of Hughes sought to avoid relinquishing temporary control of his Cali-

Back Page Col. 6

From Page 1

ifornia holdings to Los Angeles County Public Administrator Bruce Altman.

A cousin of Hughes, Richard C. Gano Jr. of Anaheim, who was granted authority as special administrator of the estate April 14, told the court that the hunt is being pressed in buildings, record storage areas, file rooms, vaults and even in aircraft hangars.

A "will search organization" has been set up to oversee the systematic effort, with the cooperation of longtime personal and business associates of Hughes, the court was told. However, an "enormous" volume of records requires much more work to be done.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge David N. Eagleson has scheduled a hearing today on Altman's request to be named special administrator in place of Gano.

Gano, contending that the complex legal issues are likely to become moot if a will is found, submitted a motion yesterday asking the court to postpone proceedings for another four or five days to permit completion of the search for a will.

An indication of the present solidarity between the Hughes kin and the top echelon of the Hughes business empire is that Gano is represented by Davis and Cox, a New York law firm. One of its partners, Chester Davis, is a long-time director and counsel for Summa Corp., the Hughes private holding company.

Gano's legal filings yesterday not only argued against Altman's contention that he has priority in administering the Hughes estate, but declared that Altman's effort to "intrude himself" had already resulted in thwarting Gano's search for a Hughes safety deposit box in the South Hollywood branch of the Bank of America.

It is there that a Hughes will was placed in the mid-1950s, according to Noah Dietrich, who was a top aide of Hughes until he left the organization in 1957.

Among the documents submitted to the court yesterday by Gano was a purported copy of a letter dated March 3, 1938, with the name of Hughes typed above the space left for a signature.

Addressed to First National Bank in Houston, the letter gave instructions for handling the will that was said to be enclosed.

The bank was told to deposit two envelopes, one containing the will, in a safety deposit box.

The other envelope contained instructions about keeping the will envelope sealed "until definite physical proof of my death or until the lapse of the period of time described" in the instructions.

However, Gano stated to the court, "the location of such will has not been determined at this time."

Although the provisions of the 1938 will are not known, the Gano declaration said, "it is believed" that the will carried out "the avowed testamentary intention" of Hughes in support of medical research.

If a valid will exists leaving Hughes' estate to charity, it will escape huge U.S. death taxes. Otherwise, the government could take about three-fourths of the estate — estimated at around \$2 billion.

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