

3 Relatives of Hughes Join Will Dispute

By ROBERT LINDSEY

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LOS ANGELES, April 27—The emerging battle over the estate of Howard R. Hughes intensified today when three distant cousins joined Los Angeles County to try to wrest administration of the estate here from 12 other cousins and executives of Mr. Hughes's business organization.

Urging Superior Court Judge Neil Lake to revoke an earlier decision appointing Richard C. Gano Jr., a first cousin of Mr. Hughes, as temporary administrator of the estate in California, lawyers for the county argued that Mr. Gano had a conflict of interest, and that the search for a Hughes will should be directed neutrally by the county administrator, Bruce Altman.

Attorneys for Mr. Gano said once again that they had "evidence" of the existence of a will, but gave no details. They appealed for more time to conduct a worldwide search.

Judge Delays Ruling

After the 30-minute hearing, Judge Lake took the argument under submission. He gave no indication of when he would rule.

Paul Freese, a Los Angeles lawyer who said he represented

three granddaughters of one of Mr. Hughes's uncles, joined the county's efforts. He argued that if the search for the will was left to Mr. Gano, who is working closely with executives of the Summa Corporation, the Hughes umbrella organization, the estate would be forever hounded by suspicion, doubt and mystery over whether the full truth were known.

"This case will be like the [President John F.] Kennedy assassination, he said. "People will have paranoia and suspicion."

Mr. Freese said that he represented Mrs. Agnes Roberts and Mrs. Elspeth DePould, both of Cleveland, and Mrs. Barbara Cameron of Los Angeles. He said they were the granddaughters of Rupert Hughes, the author and brother of Howard Hughes's father. These paternal cousins, once removed, have not joined a dozen maternal first cousins whose interests are being represented by the Summa executives.

The value of the fortune has been estimated at upwards of \$1.5 billion. Include are seven major gambling casinos in Nevada, a regional airline, a helicopter plant and other assets. If Mr. Hughes left no valid will, the empire apparently will have

to be dismembered to pay inheritance taxes.

The Summa representatives, however, have maintained that Mr. Hughes on several occasions declared his intention to bequeath his estate to "medical research," which would exempt it from taxation and permit the properties to continue in operation.

'Conflict of Interest' Noted

Gordon W. Treharne, a county lawyer representing Mr. Altman, maintaining that Mr. Gano had a "conflict of interest" in directing the search for a will, said that the secrecy and peculiar nature of Mr. Hughes's life made it especially important that a neutral public administrator be allowed to conduct the search.

"He [Mr. Hughes] may have been perverse enough to not leave a will [so he could] let everything come out into the open," Mr. Treharne said.

Among many questions to be answered in settlement of the estate, he continued, was a question of Mr. Hughes's legal residency, adding that the mobility made possible by the jet airplane was causing a new look at many aspects of this issue.

Asserting that the Hughes organization was continuing to maintain the same kind of secrecy about its operations that characterized it during Mr. Hughes's lifetime, Mr. Treharne added that "one of the first things that we'd do" in searching for a will "is to bring down the officers of the Summa Corporation and require them to justify about everything they know" about a possible will and other details of the estate.

Representatives of the 60-year-old Mr. Gano, who was not present, argued however, that he had been duly appointed as a temporary administrator, was a "honest man" and that more time was needed to search for a will.

"Howard Hughes died, but he isn't gone," said one lawyer, Martin Cook. "His associates, and friends over the years," he added, "continue to respond to his passion for privacy," and "his demise is not going to change their pattern over the past 30 years." Thus, he said, insiders were better qualified than outsiders to ferret out the will if there is one.