

Hughes' real will: It's up to Nevada jury

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LAS VEGAS — The people who will decide the authenticity of the \$2.5-billion "Mormon will" of the late Howard Hughes could include a blackjack dealer from one of the billionaire's gambling casinos or someone listed on Las Vegas welfare rolls.

District Judge Keith Hayes set the stage Friday for a courtroom battle royal over the biggest contested fortune in American history when he ordered a jury trial to determine whether the three-page document was genuine.

Hayes explained yesterday that the trial, starting Jan. 10, would be conducted under regular Nevada procedure, which provides for a jury of eight persons in civil suits.

The jurors will be selected from sources including voter registration lists, utility company customers, welfare rolls and lists of persons with dog licenses.

Principal witnesses will be at least a dozen handwriting experts giving opinions on whether the document found in the headquar-

ters of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City was written by the eccentric billionaire.

It is the only one of some 30 purported wills filed with the Clark County clerk's office here with any semblance of legitimacy. It divides the fortune into fractions as small as one-sixteenth, leaves a share to a filling station operator and cuts out a number of Hughes' relatives.

Proponents of the "Mormon will" will be attorneys representing one-time Hughes aide Noah Dietrich, who was named in the document as executor of the estate.

Disputing its authenticity will be 20 blood relatives of Hughes, who had no children, no brothers or sisters and no wife at the time of his death, and the State of Texas, which stands to collect an estimated \$335 million inheritance tax if the will is probated there. Nevada has no such tax.

Texas Att. Gen. John Hill has argued the courts should first decide Hughes' legal domicile before proceeding with a determination on the authenticity of any document.