

New Disclosures On Hughes' Will

Los Angeles

For six months before Howard R. Hughes died last April 5, his top-level employees had urged him to revise a will they thought he had signed that named Noah Dietrich as trustee of the Hughes estate.

Dietrich, a longtime Hughes aide, had fallen out with the reclusive industrialist and had been regarded as a Hughes enemy.

But apparently there was no such will, and Hughes had apparently been playing psychological games with his staff just as he had done so often on other matters over the years.

This was among the disclosures in a 274-page report filed with the Los Angeles county Probate Court Friday on behalf of Richard C. Gand Jr., a cousin of Hughes who is special administrator of the Hughes estate in California.

The report confirmed that no will had been found, although unsigned wills have been located. The search will continue until a valid will is found or a court rules that Hughes died without ever preparing one.

Nadine Henley, senior vice president of Hughes' holding company, Summa Corp., wrote to Hughes on Sept. 16, 1975, that one of his staff had said he (Hughes) had asked about his will.

"I am so glad that you did because I have been worrying about it, as it needs updating very much indeed," Henley wrote in a longhand note. "Noah Dietrich is named as one of your executors, as well as Ralph Damon, and others you may want to re-evaluate."

Dietrich, who is 37 and lives here, broke with Hughes in 1957. Thereafter, while never speaking again, they were frequent opponents in lawsuits concerning various phases of their close association — an association that spanned three decades. Damon was one of the presidents of Trans World Airlines when Hughes controlled it.

The report to Probate Judge Neil Lake shows a copy of the will that Henley referred to, and it was never signed. Some blank spaces in the draft have been filled in with her handwriting, on Hughes' telephoned instructions of 30 years ago; but other sections, such as the names and amounts of specific bequests, are still blank.

When one of his aides mentioned the matter to Hughes in the hotel room in the Bahamas where he lived at that time, the aging recluse replied that he would "get down to constructing a new will as soon as possible."

Among the 200 pages of exhibits turned up in the search for a signed Hughes will was a memo written in longhand from Hughes to Howard R. Eckersley, one of the aides.

In the memo, which was undated but believed to have been written in 1971 after he had moved from Las Vegas to the Bahamas, Hughes wrote, "I don't know how many more summers I have left." He discussed the provisions he claimed to have taken to reward the faithful group of executive aides who lived with him 24 hours a day.