

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

# **CALIFORNIA LAW REVISION COMMISSION**

**RECOMMENDATION AND STUDY**

*relating to*

**Mortgages To Secure Future Advances**

**November 1958**

## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

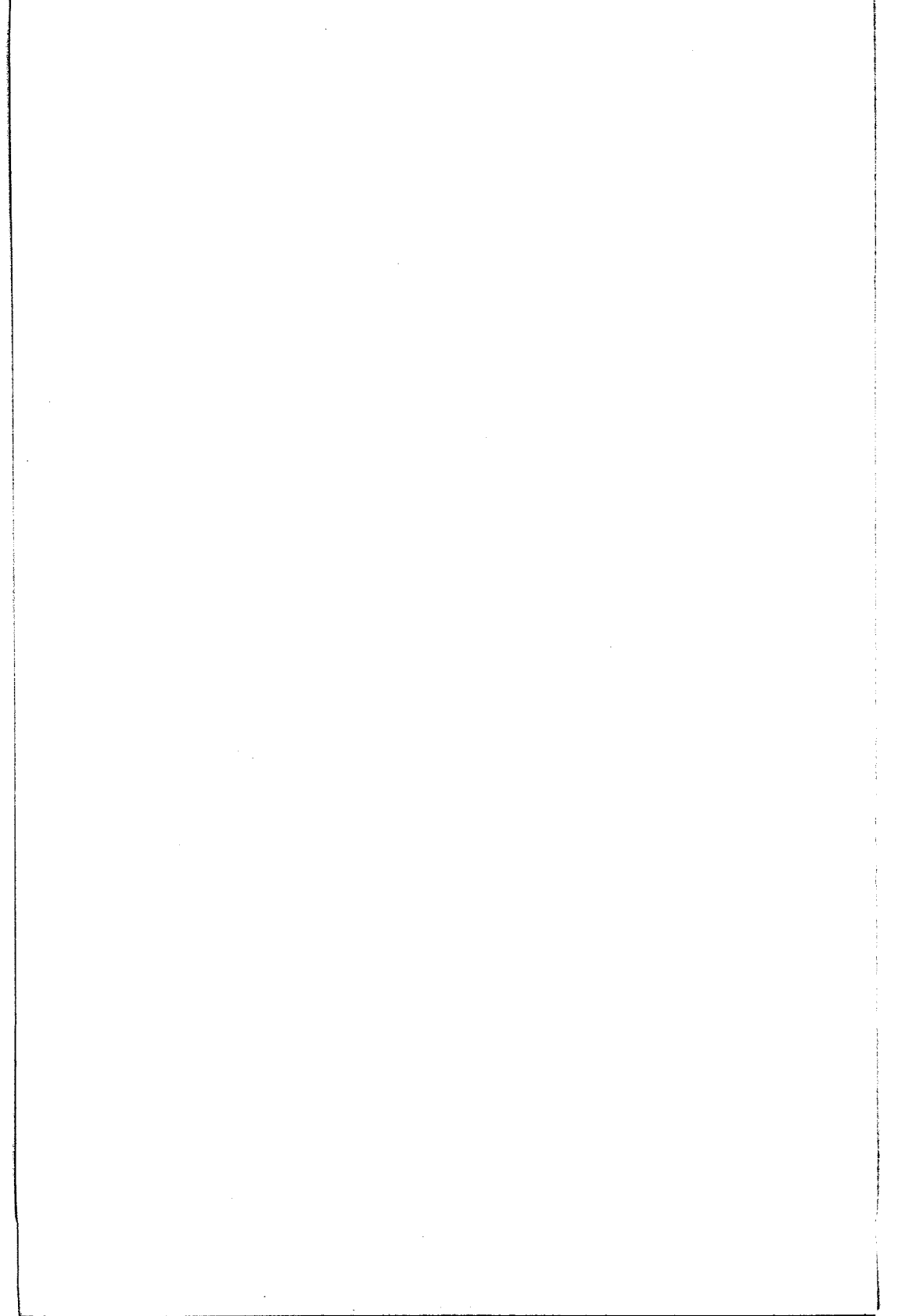
To HIS EXCELLENCY GOODWIN J. KNIGHT  
*Governor of California*  
*and to the Members of the Legislature*

The California Law Revision Commission was authorized by Resolution Chapter 42 of the Statutes of 1956 to make a study to determine whether the law respecting mortgages to secure future advances should be revised. The Commission submits herewith its recommendation relating to this subject and the study prepared by its research consultant, Professor John Henry Merryman of the School of Law, Stanford University.

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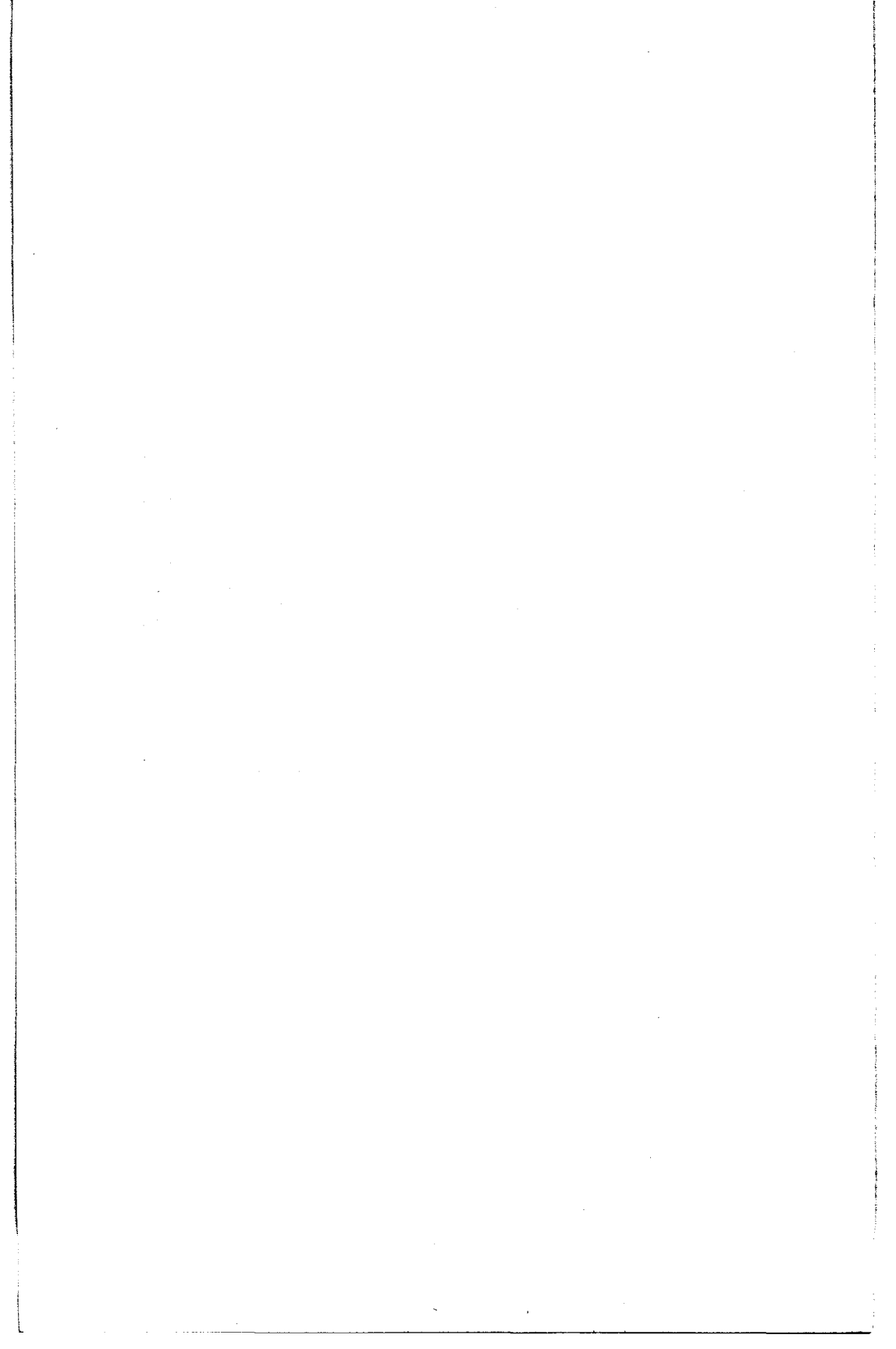
JOHN R. McDONOUGH, JR.  
*Executive Secretary*

November 1958



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
RECOMMENDATION OF THE CALIFORNIA LAW REVISION COMMISSION -----	C-5
A STUDY RELATING TO MORTGAGES TO SECURE FUTURE ADVANCES -----	C-9
REAL PROPERTY -----	C-10
Mortgages Expressed To Cover Future Advances -----	C-10
Mortgages Not Expressed To Cover Future Advances : Overstated Present Advance -----	C-13
PERSONAL PROPERTY -----	C-14
POSSIBLE REVISION -----	C-20
Real Property -----	C-20
Personal Property -----	C-24



# RECOMMENDATION OF THE CALIFORNIA LAW REVISION COMMISSION

## RELATING TO MORTGAGES TO SECURE FUTURE ADVANCES

In a mortgage for future advances a present lien is created on the property used as security but the parties agree that all or part of the loan secured is to be made in the future. The major legal problem arising under such mortgages is that of priority as between the mortgagee and one who acquires a lien on the property after the mortgage becomes effective but prior to one or more of the subsequent advances under it. Under the rules applied by a majority of American jurisdictions priority between subsequent advances and intervening liens is made to turn on a distinction taken between obligatory and optional advances. If the mortgagee is legally bound by the agreement between the parties to make subsequent advances, they are called obligatory and are entitled to priority even though the mortgagee had actual notice of the intervening lien when the advance was made. If the mortgagee is not under a legal obligation to make future advances they are called optional and are inferior in priority to intervening liens of which the mortgagee had actual notice when the advance was made. Record notice, however, is not enough.

Except for a statute enacted in 1957 which in some situations gives an optional advance under a construction mortgage priority over an intervening mechanics' lien of which the mortgagee had actual notice, the California law on real property mortgages for future advances is decisional rather than statutory. The California courts have applied the general rules outlined above to such mortgages. After a careful study the Law Revision Commission's research consultant concluded that no change in our law respecting real property mortgages for future advances is necessary or desirable. His conclusion was subsequently concurred in by several attorneys of long experience in this field whose views were solicited by the research consultant at the request of the Commission. On the basis of its study of the matter the Commission has concluded that no change should be made in the law of this State respecting real property mortgages for future advances and respectfully so recommends to the Legislature.

Prior to 1935 the California law respecting personal property mortgages for future advances was also decisional rather than statutory. In that year the Legislature enacted Sections 2974 and 2975 of the Civil Code, both of which give the same priority to optional as to obligatory advances under mortgages of personal property for future advances, provided certain conditions are met. The condition specified in Section 2974 is that the mortgage state that it is for the purpose of financing the mortgagor during one or more production periods;

that specified in Section 2975 is that the maximum amount to be secured be stated in the mortgage.

As the report of the Commission's research consultant shows, the origin of Sections 2974 and 2975 is obscure, their meaning is in many respects unclear, and they appear to overlap to a considerable degree. The major question left unanswered by these sections is what consequence follows when a personal property mortgage for future advances does not comply with the conditions specified in them. The research consultant concluded that the result is not that the mortgage is void but is only that optional advances thereunder are not entitled to priority over intervening liens of which the mortgagee has actual notice at the time of the advance. This conclusion was concurred in by the experienced attorneys with whom the consultant discussed the question. However, the matter is one of such importance that it ought not to be left open until a case requires its authoritative decision.

The research consultant concluded that Sections 2974 and 2975 should be consolidated into a single new section which would retain the best features of each section while eliminating the existing ambiguities in them and which would have the substantive legal effect of giving optional advances the same priority as obligatory advances if the maximum amount to be secured is stated in the mortgage. The Commission concurs in this conclusion and has drafted a statute for this purpose (see proposed statute, *infra*). The new Section 2975 of the Civil Code which this statute would enact would, in the main, codify rather than change existing law with respect to mortgages of personal property to secure future advances. Its salient features are the following:

1. If optional advances are to have the same priority as obligatory advances, the maximum amount to be secured must be stated. This continues in effect a provision presently found in Section 2975 of the Civil Code and serves to give subsequent lienors some notice of the potential maximum amount of the mortgagee's prior lien on the property. It should be noted, however, that the proposed statute limits the mortgagee's priority to the amount stated only with respect to advances and not with respect to accrued interest or advances and expenditures made by the mortgagee which are necessary to preserve the value of the security. Thus, the total amount entitled to priority over intervening liens including advances, accrued interest and expenditures necessary to preserve the security may exceed the amount stated in the mortgage.

2. The stated maximum amount refers only to advances outstanding at any given time; amounts previously advanced and repaid are not included. This provision is taken from present Section 2975. It permits flexibility in credit arrangements on an "open account" basis, under which sums are regularly advanced and repaid, but does not create any special hardship to the subsequent lienor who is on record notice when he acts that the mortgagee's lien for advances may be equal to the maximum amount stated.

3. Repayment in full of a mortgage of personal property for future advances does not discharge it. This provision is taken from Section 2974 which in turn merely codifies an earlier decisional rule. The justification for this provision is the same as that for disregarding amounts

previously advanced and repaid—i.e., the desirability of keeping such a mortgage “alive” so long as the parties desire to utilize it in an “open account” credit arrangement. Of course, if a mortgagor who has repaid a mortgage for future advances in full desires to have it discharged he is entitled under Section 2941 of the Civil Code to have the mortgagee deliver a certificate of discharge or enter a satisfaction of record; a cross-reference to Section 2941 is included in proposed new Section 2975 to remove any doubt on this point.

4. The provision that advances and expenditures made by the mortgagee which are necessary to preserve the security are entitled to the priority originally established by the mortgage and the provision that accrued interest on an advance has the same priority as that of the advance itself are believed merely to codify existing law and are included to avoid any ambiguity on these matters which might otherwise be thought to exist. These provisions are, of course, applicable to all mortgages for future advances, whether or not the maximum amount to be secured is stated in the mortgage.

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The Commission's recommendation would be effectuated by enactment of the following measure:

*An act to repeal Sections 2974 and 2975 and to enact Section 2975 of the Civil Code, all relating to mortgages of personal property or crops to secure future advances.*

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

SECTION 1. Sections 2974 and 2975 of the Civil Code are repealed.

SEC. 2. Section 2975 of the Civil Code is enacted to read:

2975. Mortgages of personal property or crops or both may be given to secure future advances.

The lien for the following advances and expenditures made by the mortgagee under a mortgage for future advances has the same priority as that originally established by the mortgage:

1. If the maximum amount to be secured is stated in the mortgage, all advances to that amount secured at any one time (excluding amounts already repaid or discharged), whether optional or obligatory.
2. If the maximum amount to be secured is not stated in the mortgage, all obligatory advances and all optional advances made without actual notice of intervening liens.
3. In all cases, advances and expenditures necessary to preserve the security.

Accrued interest has the same priority as the advance or expenditure to which it relates.



Repayment in full of amounts owing under a mortgage for future advances does not extinguish the mortgage. Any such mortgage shall be discharged on demand of the mortgagor in conformity with the provisions of Section 2941 of this code.

As used in this section future advances include sums that may be advanced, expenditures that may be made, and indebtedness or obligations that may be incurred subsequent to the execution of the mortgage.

## A STUDY RELATING TO MORTGAGES TO SECURE FUTURE ADVANCES \*

In a mortgage for future advances a present lien is created on the property used as security but the parties agree that all or part of the loan secured is to be made in the future. A familiar example is the building construction loan, in which advances are made to the mortgagor as construction proceeds. There are practical and legal advantages to the parties in this procedure. The mortgagee acquires a lien on land and improvements from the time of the original mortgage which is superior, in appropriate cases, to encumbrances later than the mortgage but prior to one or more of the future advances. Since he advances funds as construction progresses the value of his security increases as the loan grows. The mortgagor avoids paying interest on the total loan during the time he does not need it. The financing cost to him is lower than he would have had to pay had he executed a first mortgage for the initial advance and second and third mortgages for later ones, with their higher interest rates and the necessity for additional title searches.<sup>1</sup>

In California such mortgages are in common use in this and a variety of other situations, some of which are described in the discussion below. Prior to 1935 both real and personal property mortgages to secure future advances were governed entirely by case law. In that year Sections 2974 and 2975, specifically applicable to chattel security, were added to the Civil Code.<sup>2</sup> One result of this legislation was to raise a series of problems peculiar to chattel security for future advances. Real property security was governed entirely by the cases until 1957.<sup>3</sup> Because of problems involved in interpretation of the legisla-

\* This study was made at the direction of the Law Revision Commission by Professor John Henry Merryman of the School of Law, Stanford University.

<sup>1</sup> See OSBORNE, MORTGAGES § 113 (1951); 4 AMERICAN LAW OF PROPERTY § 16.70 (Casner ed. 1952). Although the corporate mortgage is in some ways similar to a mortgage for future advances it raises many problems of an entirely different kind and has accordingly been omitted from this study. See 3 GLENN, MORTGAGES §§ 405-406.3 (1943); OSBORNE, MORTGAGES § 123 (1951); 4 AMERICAN LAW OF PROPERTY § 16.78 (Casner ed. 1952).

<sup>2</sup> Cal. Stat. 1935, c. 817, §§ 8, 9, pp. 2227, 2228.

<sup>3</sup> The 1957 California Legislature enacted chapter 1146, amending Code of Civil Procedure § 1188.1 by adding the following paragraph:

A mortgage or deed of trust which would be prior to any of the liens provided for in this chapter to the extent of obligatory advances made thereunder in accordance with the commitment of the lender shall also be prior to the liens provided for in this chapter as to any other advances, secured by such mortgage or deed of trust, which are used in payment of any claim of lien as provided for in this chapter, if any, which is recorded at the date or dates of such other advances and thereafter in the payment of all or any part of the costs of any work of improvement on the property which is subject to such mortgage or deed of trust; provided, that the priority of such mortgage or deed of trust shall not exceed in total for both obligatory advances made in accordance with the commitment of the lender and other advances the amount of the original obligatory commitment of the lender as shown in said mortgage or deed of trust.

This legislation makes mechanics' liens inferior to subsequent advances, whether optional or obligatory, if the advances are used to pay for construction or improvement of the property mortgaged. This is the only existing legislation specifically applicable to mortgages of real property to secure future advances.

tion enacted in 1935 this study was authorized "... to determine whether the law respecting mortgages to secure future advances should be revised."<sup>4</sup> The real property problems, being fundamental to comprehension of the legislation, are discussed first.

### REAL PROPERTY

The major legal problem in mortgages<sup>5</sup> of real property for future advances is that of priority. Most of the reported litigation is in this area. The classic case is a dispute between the mortgagee for future advances and one who has acquired a lien on the property secured after that mortgage became effective but prior to one or more of the subsequent advances under it. In solving such disputes the California courts apply rules which are similar to those of a majority of American jurisdictions and which appear to be well settled.

The existence of a recording act, with its penalties for failure to record mortgages, insures that the disputes will ordinarily occur between parties who examined the record before they acted and who recorded the relevant instruments after they had done so. As a result solution of priority problems depends in part on the provisions of the applicable recording act.

#### Mortgages Expressed To Cover Future Advances

This type of mortgage indicates on its face, and thus shows on the record, that it is given to secure future advances. Although it may also indicate the specific nature and amounts of the advances or the total amount to be loaned this information is not necessary, and its lack does not affect the validity or priority of the mortgage.<sup>6</sup> If properly recorded such mortgages are entitled to priority on all sums advanced before the creation of additional liens.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cal. Stat. 1956, res. c. 42, p. 263.

<sup>5</sup> The same rules apply to trust deeds to secure future advances, *Atkinson v. Foote*, 44 Cal. App. 149, 186 Pac. 831 (1919), and by analogy they have been applied to the assignment of a chose in action to secure future advances, *Willard v. National Supply Co.*, 51 Cal. App.2d 555, 125 P.2d 519 (1942). Prior to 1935 chattel mortgages for future advances were subject to the same rules. See *Frank H. Buck Co. v. Buck*, 162 Cal. 300, 122 Pac. 466 (1912).

<sup>6</sup> *Frank H. Buck Co. v. Buck*, 162 Cal. 300, 122 Pac. 466 (1912); *Tapia v. Demartini*, 77 Cal. 383, 19 Pac. 641 (1888); *Oaks v. Weingartner*, 105 Cal. App.2d 598, 234 P.2d 194 (1951). In Connecticut, Maryland and New Hampshire the maximum amount must be stated. *Matz v. Arick*, 78 Conn. 388, 58 Atl. 630 (1904); *Stoughton v. Pasco*, 5 Conn. 442 (1835); *Hewitt, The Rule in Matz v. Arick*, 2 Conn. B.J. 237 (1928); Md. CODE ANN. Art. 66, § 2 (1957); *In re Shapiro*, 34 F. Supp. 737 (D.C. Md. 1940); *High Grade Brick Co. v. Amos*, 95 Md. 571, 53 Atl. 582, 53 Atl. 148 (1902); *Watkins, Maryland Mortgages for Future Advances*, 4 Md. L. Rev. 111 (1940); N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. c. 479:3-479:5 (1955); *Mica Products Co. v. Heath*, 81 N.E. 470, 128 Atl. 805 (1925). In Georgia the statute requires that the mortgage "specify the debt to secure which it is given." This has not been interpreted to require that the maximum amount be stated if it can be otherwise ascertained. GA. CODE § 67-102 (1933); *Allen v. Lathrop & Co.*, 46 Ga. 134 (1872).

<sup>7</sup> This proposition is assumed in most of the cases but it is so obvious that none have stated it. See 3 GLENN, MORTGAGES § 400 (1943); OSBORN, MORTGAGES § 118 (1951); 4 AMERICAN LAW OF PROPERTY § 16.73 (Casner ed. 1952).

Priority between subsequent advances and intervening liens is made to turn on a distinction between obligatory and optional advances.<sup>8</sup> If the mortgagee is legally obliged by the agreement between the parties to make subsequent advances he will be entitled to priority as to them even though he has had actual notice of the intervening lien.<sup>9</sup> This result may be supported on the theory that the obligation to make the advances became effective when the mortgage was executed and thus existed from its inception. Being prior in time to the intervening lien it is superior to it. The later payment is not really a new advance; it is merely deferred payment of a prior obligation.<sup>10</sup> Since the mortgage is recorded and shows that it is given to secure future advances a prospective purchaser or encumbrancer has notice that his lien is possibly inferior to that of the mortgagee. He can by inquiry ascertain additional facts, such as whether the advances are obligatory or what the total amount of the mortgage is, which will enable him to act wisely.<sup>11</sup> A more practical justification is that a different rule would impair the utility and flexibility of what appears to be a useful financing device while adding little to the protection of the intervening lienor.

If the mortgagee is not under a legal obligation to make future advances they are called optional. Subject to a statutory exception in favor of construction mortgages and against mechanics' lienors,<sup>12</sup> the rule is that optional advances made after *actual*<sup>13</sup> notice of intervening

<sup>8</sup> The distinction between optional and obligatory advances was not made in the leading case of *Tapia v. Demartini*, 77 Cal. 283, 19 Pac. 641 (1888), or in *Hall v. Glass*, 128 Cal. 500, 56 Pac. 336, 69 Am. St. Rep. 77 (1899), but all the later California cases recognize and apply it. In Maryland the distinction is not observed in that neither type is given priority. See authorities cited note 6 *supra*. In Mississippi and Texas the reverse situation exists; both optional and obligatory advances are given priority, even though actual notice of the intervening lien has been received before the advance is made. Consequently the distinction is not of importance in determining priorities. *Gray v. Helm*, 60 Miss. 181 (1882); *Witosinski v. Everman*, 51 Miss. 841 (1876); *First Nat. Bank v. Zarafonetia*, 15 S.W.2d 155 (Tex. Civ. App. 1929); *Willis v. Sanger Bros.*, 15 Tex. Civ. App. 658, 40 S.W. 229 (1897).

<sup>9</sup> *Smith v. Anglo-California Trust Co.*, 205 Cal. 496, 271 Pac. 898 (1928); *Fickling v. Jackman*, 203 Cal. 657, 265 Pac. 810 (1928); *Willard v. National Supply Co.*, 51 Cal. App.2d 555, 125 P.2d 519 (1942); *Lumber & Builders Supply Co. v. Ritz*, 134 Cal. App. 607, 25 P.2d 1002 (1933); *E. K. Wood Lumber Co. v. Mulholland*, 118 Cal. App. 475, 5 P.2d 669 (1931); *Atkinson v. Foote*, 44 Cal. App. 149, 186 Pac. 831 (1919); *Valley Lumber Co. v. Wright*, 2 Cal. App. 288, 84 Pac. 58 (1905).

<sup>10</sup> In Maryland mortgages for obligatory future advances are not given priority. However, if the bank credits the full amount of the loan to the account of the mortgagor under an agreement that stated amounts will be released at stated intervals the effect desired is achieved. The distinction seems to be based on the idea that the irrevocable credit to the mortgagor's account is more like an escrow loan than a mortgage for future advances. See Md. CODE ANN. Art. 66, § 2 (1957); *Bldg. & Loan Assn. v. Lumber Co.*, 168 Md. 199, 178 Atl. 214 (1934); *Elsinger Mill & Lumber Co. v. Dillon*, 159 Md. 185, 150 Atl. 267 (1930); *Loan & Savings Assn. v. Tracey*, 142 Md. 211, 120 Atl. 441 (1923); *Western Nat'l Bank v. Jenkins*, 181 Md. 289, 101 Atl. 667 (1917); 3 GLENN, MORTGAGES § 400.1 (1948); OSBORNE, MORTGAGES § 115 (1951); *Watkins, Maryland Mortgages for Future Advances*, 4 Md. L. Rev. 111 (1940).

In *Smith v. Anglo-California Trust Co.*, 205 Cal. 496, 271 Pac. 898 (1928), an arrangement of this type was treated as a mortgage for obligatory future advances.

<sup>11</sup> Presumably the mortgagee is expected to respond frankly to such inquiries. The cases do not indicate what the consequences might be should he refuse. However, bankers state that they give such information freely to persons with interests beyond mere curiosity.

<sup>12</sup> See note 3 *supra*.

<sup>13</sup> Although the decisions speak of the necessity for "actual notice" the context always indicates that they mean to say only that record notice is insufficient. See cases collected in Annot., 138 A.L.R. 566, 586 (1942). In *Atkinson v. Foote*, 44 Cal. App. 149, 186 Pac. 831 (1919), the court held that notice to the attorney (agent) was notice to the client (principal). The reasoning was that this was something more than record notice and thus sufficient. No other discussion of the question has been found.

liens are inferior to them.<sup>14</sup> Record notice is not enough.<sup>15</sup> This result seems logical since the mortgagee, by definition, has no legal obligation to make the future advances and thus has little standing to object if he does so knowing that others have preceded him. The requirement of actual notice makes it unnecessary for him to conduct a new title search before making each advance, thus helping preserve the utility of the mortgage for future advances as a security device. The intervening lienor should have made such a search himself, in any event, and it is not too great a burden to require him to give notice to the mortgagee.

These rules are well settled and it seems undesirable to disturb them. However they raise certain problems in application which require some consideration. For one, the distinction between obligatory and optional advances, while clear enough as a concept, is not always so in practice. Even in the relatively simple case in which the mortgage itself contains the understanding of the parties as to the times, amounts and conditions of advances it may not be possible to ascertain without litigation whether the mortgagee is or is not under a legal obligation to make them. In such a case a prospective lienor cannot be sure that by giving notice to the mortgagee he will protect himself by acquiring a security interest superior to any subsequent advances the mortgagee might make. The uncertainty will have the same effect on the mortgagee, who cannot be sure whether any subsequent advances, after notice received, are protected. The probable result will be that the mortgagor will find it more difficult to borrow money on admittedly adequate security. Thus whatever interests are served by having some degree of certainty in business transactions and by encouraging commercial activity are frustrated.

The problem becomes more acute in those situations where the mortgage itself does not include the agreement of the parties as to the times, amounts and conditions of advances. In a number of such cases the parties have agreed orally as to the manner in which future advances will be made. Such agreements naturally do not appear on the record. The uncertainty about whether they do or do not create a legal obligation on the mortgagee to advance further sums is likely to be greater than if the agreement had been included in the mortgage. A number of such cases have come before the California courts, which have admitted evidence concerning collateral agreements as to the optional or obliga-

<sup>14</sup> *Savings & L. Soc. v. Burnett*, 106 Cal. 514, 39 Pac. 922 (1895); *Tapia v. Demartini*, 77 Cal. 383, 19 Pac. 641 (1888); *Yost-Linn Lumber Co. v. Williams*, 121 Cal. App. 571, 9 P.2d 324 (1932); *Althouse v. Provident Mut. etc. Assn.*, 59 Cal. App. 31, 209 Pac. 1018 (1922); *W. P. Fuller & Co. v. McClure*, 48 Cal. App. 185, 191 Pac. 1027 (1920); *Atkinson v. Foote*, 44 Cal. App. 149, 186 Pac. 831 (1919).

In New Hampshire optional mortgages for future advances are valid only as to the present advance made. N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. c. 479:3, 479:4 (1955); *Stavers v. Philbrick*, 68 N.H. 379, 36 Atl. 16 (1895); *Abbott v. Thompson*, 58 N.H. 255 (1878). In 1955 this statute was amended in language which appears to change the rule to one more in conformity with the majority. N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. c. 479:4 (Supp. 1957). In Mississippi and Texas optional advances have priority even though actual notice has been received. See authorities cited note 8 *supra*.

<sup>15</sup> In *Hall v. Glass*, 123 Cal. 500, 56 Pac. 336, 69 Am. St. Rep. 77 (1899), a case dealing with a crop mortgage, the court appeared to approve the rule that recording was sufficient notice to give priority over subsequent optional advances. However all the other cases, including later ones, are contra. In three jurisdictions record notice has been held sufficient to destroy priority of subsequent optional advances. *Ladue v. Detroit & Milwaukee Railroad Co.*, 13 Mich. 380, 87 Am. Dec. 759 (1865); *Spader v. Lawler*, 17 Ohio 371, 49 Am. Dec. 461 (1848); *Kuhn v. Loan & Trust Co.*, 101 Ohio St. 34, 126 N.E. 820 (1920); *McClure v. Roman*, 52 Pa. 458 (1866); *Appeal of The Bank of Commerce*, 44 Pa. 423 (1863); *Bank of Montgomery County's Appeal*, 36 Pa. 170 (1860); *Parker v. Jacoby*, 3 Grant Cas. 300 (Pa. 1860); *TerHoven v. Kerns*, 2 Pa. 96 (1845).

tory character of future advances, even when oral.<sup>16</sup> Such cases indicate that uncertainty about whether advances were obligatory or optional is a source of litigation in the field. Consideration might be given to methods of avoiding this problem. This question is discussed *infra*.

#### Mortgages Not Expressed To Cover Future Advances: Overstated Present Advance

Some mortgages for future advances do not so state, being in the form of a present loan of a stated sum, but with only part of the sum actually advanced at the time. The understanding of the parties is that future advances to the maximum stated may or will be made. This form of mortgage is a deceptive overstatement of the obligation which troubles courts when they first encounter it.<sup>17</sup> However the rule is that they are valid as mortgages for future advances.<sup>18</sup> An overstatement of the obligation secured by the first mortgage cannot harm the intervening lienor, so the reasoning goes, but can only operate in his favor. The excess of value of the security over the prior lien is greater than the record would lead him to suppose. To this it might be added that in many cases a prospective lienor will inquire of the mortgagee to learn to what extent the principal of the loan secured has been amortized and whether the mortgagor is in default. In the course of such inquiries the amount actually owed the mortgagee should become apparent. An opposing consideration is that such an overstatement of the loan secured may mislead a person who has a junior lien into failure to enforce it. Another is that an assignee of the mortgagee may be misled by the record into thinking he is acquiring a larger interest than is in fact true. This possibility of fraud can easily be overstated, since in most cases the mortgagee is a bank or other responsible financial institution.

In California and most other jurisdictions<sup>19</sup> the same rules as to priority apply to mortgages of this type as to those expressly made to secure future advances, with one exception: the amount stated as the present advance is the maximum loan which will be given priority.<sup>20</sup> In mortgages expressed to secure future advances no such maximum need be stated and consequently no such limit exists.<sup>21</sup> This difference is probably not of much importance, since the parties can always provide that the maximum amount to be secured is a figure sufficiently large to include most contemplated contingencies.

<sup>16</sup> *Hall v. Glass*, 123 Cal. 500, 56 Pac. 336, 69 Am. St. Rep. 77 (1899); *Lumber & Builders Supply Co. v. Ritz*, 134 Cal. App. 607, 25 P.2d 1002 (1933); *W. F. Fuller & Co. v. McClure*, 48 Cal. App. 185, 191 Pac. 1027 (1920).

<sup>17</sup> *Tapia v. Demartini*, 77 Cal. 383, 19 Pac. 641 (1888); *Tully v. Harloe*, 35 Cal. 302, 95 Am. Dec. 102 (1868).

<sup>18</sup> *Smith v. Anglo-California Trust Co.*, 205 Cal. 496, 271 Pac. 898 (1928); *Tapia v. Demartini*, 77 Cal. 383, 19 Pac. 641 (1888); *Tully v. Harloe*, 35 Cal. 302, 95 Am. Dec. 102 (1868); *W. F. Fuller & Co. v. McClure*, 48 Cal. App. 185, 191 Pac. 1027 (1920); *Valley Lumber Co. v. Wright*, 2 Cal. App. 288, 84 Pac. 58 (1905). In Connecticut such mortgages are protected only as to the amounts originally advanced and all subsequent advances are inferior to intervening liens. The restrictive statutes in New Hampshire (discussed note 14 *supra*) and Maryland (discussed notes 6, 10 *supra*) appear to make them void. See 3 GLENN, MORTGAGES § 403 (1943); OSBORNE, MORTGAGES § 122 (1951); 4 AMERICAN LAW OF PROPERTY § 16.77 (Casner ed. 1952).

<sup>19</sup> 3 GLENN, MORTGAGES § 398 (1943); OSBORNE, MORTGAGES § 116 (1951); 4 AMERICAN LAW OF PROPERTY § 16.72 (Casner ed. 1952).

<sup>20</sup> *Tapia v. Demartini*, 77 Cal. 383, 19 Pac. 641 (1888); *Tully v. Harloe*, 35 Cal. 302, 95 Am. Dec. 102 (1868).

<sup>21</sup> See discussion note 6 *supra*.

In all other respects the rules are the same. If the advances are obligatory the mortgagee is protected against intervening liens regardless of notice concerning them.<sup>22</sup> If they are optional he loses priority as to advances made after actual notice of intervening encumbrances,<sup>23</sup> unless the advance is used to improve the property mortgaged and the intervening interest is a mechanics' lien.<sup>24</sup> Here again it might be pointed out that the record in such cases does not indicate that the mortgage is given to secure future advances, and the prospective intervening lienor cannot expect to learn of this fact, much less whether they are optional or obligatory, unless he makes inquiry of the mortgagee. Consequently it might be thought unrealistic to place the burden of actual notice to the mortgagor on him. Certainly he is not sufficiently warned by the record. While the argument that he cannot be harmed by an overstatement of the lien held by the mortgagor is persuasive, situations can be imagined in which third persons might be misled. If there is any policy to the effect that the record should be reliable and accurate it is frustrated by such a rule, which tends to require prospective lienors to make inquiry of existing mortgagors even in cases where the record shows no evidence that future advances are anticipated. Occasionally inquiry must be less convenient and less informative to the prospective encumbrancer than a straightforward record might be. This problem is further discussed below.

#### PERSONAL PROPERTY

Until 1935 there were no statutes in California specifically applicable to mortgages of either real or personal property to secure future advances<sup>25</sup> and the rules developed in the cases appeared to apply to both types.<sup>26</sup> In 1935 a number of sections were added to the Civil Code which changed the law respecting chattel mortgages, including two specifically applicable to chattel mortgages for future advances.<sup>27</sup> These sections read as follows:

2974. Where a mortgage of live stock, or other animate chattels, or crops is taken to secure mainly, or among other things, funds that may be advanced thereafter from the mortgagee or assigns at the option of either to the mortgagor, mortgagors or any of them, which funds to be advanced shall be for the purpose of financing the mortgagor, mortgagors or any of them during any regular production period or periods involving the property or any part thereof encumbered by or described in said mortgage, and during which period or periods the mortgagor, mortgagors

<sup>22</sup> *Tapia v. Demartini*, 77 Cal. 383, 19 Pac. 641 (1888), appears to ignore the distinction between optional and obligatory advances in these cases, but later decisions apply it as stated in the text. *Smith v. Anglo-California Trust Co.*, 205 Cal. 496, 271 Pac. 898 (1928); *Valley Lumber Co. v. Wright*, 2 Cal. App. 238, 84 Pac. 58 (1905).

<sup>23</sup> *Savings & L. Soc. v. Burnett*, 106 Cal. 514, 39 Pac. 922 (1895). In England under the Law of Property Act of 1925, recording the intervening lien places the mortgagee of the overstated present advance type on notice. See *Fisher & Lightwood, Mortgages* 508-09 (7th ed. 1931).

<sup>24</sup> See note 3 *supra*.

<sup>25</sup> Except the very general provision in Civil Code Section 2884 that "A lien may be created by contract, to take immediate effect, as security for the performance of obligations not then in existence."

<sup>26</sup> *Frank H. Buck Co. v. Buck*, 162 Cal. 300, 122 Pac. 466 (1912); *Tully v. Harloe*, 35 Cal. 302, 95 Am. Dec. 102 (1868); *Willard v. National Supply Co.*, 51 Cal. App. 2d 555, 125 P.2d 519 (1942).

<sup>27</sup> CAL. CIV. CODE §§ 2974, 2975.

or any of them, may need and request such financing, such mortgage shall be and continue to be (subject to the provisions of sections 2911, 2968, 2969 and 2972 of the Civil Code), until formally released or discharged in the recorder's office, a lien and encumbrance upon the property described therein, of status, effect, rank and standing equal to that established initially and thereafter obtained by such mortgage, as security for the repayment of all sums that may be or become due under such mortgage, and all obligations secured thereby, even though during such period or periods of financing the debt or debts, obligation or obligations secured by such mortgage, as they exist at any particular time, may have been repaid in full to the mortgagee or assigns, from proceeds of sale of the mortgaged property, or otherwise by the mortgagor, mortgagors, or any of them. Each such mortgage shall contain a statement that it is given for such purpose. All such mortgages shall be discharged on demand of the mortgagor, in conformity with the provisions of section 2941 of the Civil Code, whenever no sums are owing to the mortgagee, or assigns, thereunder.

2975. A mortgage of personal property or crops may be given to secure the repayment of sums that may be advanced, expenditures that may be made, or indebtednesses or obligations that may be incurred, subsequent to the execution of such mortgage. If the maximum amount the repayment of which is proposed to be secured by such mortgage, is expressed therein (whether the creation of debts in such amount or any part thereof be optional with, or obligatory upon the mortgagee or assigns), such mortgage (subject to the provisions of sections 2911, 2941, 2968, 2969 and 2972 of the Civil Code) shall be and constitute a lien or encumbrance of rank, effect, status and standing equal to that established thereby initially and as it may thereafter obtain, as security for the repayment of any sums, expenditures, indebtednesses and obligations, owing or due or becoming owing or due thereunder, up to and including such expressed maximum amount which shall be considered only as a limit of the debts, sums, expenditures, indebtednesses and obligations that may be secured thereby at any one time, and not to include such as may have existed and been repaid or discharged thereunder. A mortgage of personal property or crops shall also constitute a lien or encumbrance of rank, effect, status and standing equal to that established initially or thereafter obtained thereby, as security for the repayment of all sums or amounts that are necessarily advanced or expended by the mortgagee or assigns, for the maintenance or preservation of the property, or any part thereof, described in such mortgage.

With one minor exception<sup>28</sup> there are no reported decisions interpreting either of these sections. No legislative history has been found which might throw light on their meaning or function. It seems likely that this legislation was enacted in order to facilitate the extension of credit to farmers under the Federal Farm Credit Act of 1933. One purpose of that act was to create production credit associations to

<sup>28</sup> *Hollywood State Bank v. Cook*, 99 Cal. App.2d 333, 221 P.2d 933 (1950).



make crop and livestock loans.<sup>29</sup> Conceivably it was at the urging of these associations and other credit institutions that legislation was enacted giving them special priority in appropriate cases. The theory probably was that a clearer and more favorable legal position would encourage lenders to advance credit to farmers and thus hasten economic recovery from the depression. Specific reference in Section 2974 to production loans seems to support this theory, as do statements from persons in the lending business.<sup>30</sup>

It cannot be said that either Section 2974 or Section 2975 is entirely clear in meaning, and the only reported decision discussing either section has added to the confusion. In *Hollywood State Bank v. Cook*,<sup>31</sup> in a statement which can be classified as dictum, the court stated that Section 2975 requires that "it must appear from the mortgage itself that it is given to secure future advances." A careful reading of that section fails to show any such requirement, and the statement of the court may best be dismissed as unnecessary to the decision in the case and unwarranted by the words of the statute. Beyond this dubious contribution the reported cases include nothing which might indicate what the sections mean.

Section 2975 applies to a "mortgage of personal property or crops" while Section 2974 refers to a "mortgage of live stock, or other animate chattels, or crops." It would seem logical to conclude that Section 2975 is broad enough to include all mortgages which might fall under Section 2974 since livestock and other animate chattels form only one kind of personal property as defined in Civil Code Sections 658 and 663. Consequently the parties could conceivably draw a mortgage of livestock, other animate chattels or crops under either section, depending on which appeared to them the most advantageous under the circumstances. Under either section it would seem to be possible to obtain priority for optional future advances, either by stating the maximum amount as required by Section 2975 or by stating that the purpose of the mortgage is to finance the mortgagor during one or more regular production periods as required by Section 2974.

The hypothesis that Section 2975 is broader in scope than Section 2974 and is applicable to production mortgages is aided by the first and third sentences of Section 2975. The first seems to be very general in that it states that mortgages of personal property or crops may be given to secure future advances. The third sentence likewise is very general in stating that any advances made under a mortgage of personal property or crops for the purpose of preserving the security under the mortgage are entitled to priority. This language is quite broad and is not even restricted to mortgages given to secure future advances; presumably it applies to *any* chattel mortgage. It therefore

<sup>29</sup> There is a helpful discussion of this legislation in Preston and Bennett, *Agricultural Credit Legislation of 1933*, 42 J. POL. ECON. 6 (1934).

<sup>30</sup> "I am quite sure that the bill which became Chapter 817 of the Statutes of 1935, which added these two sections to the code and made other changes in the sections dealing with chattel mortgages, was sponsored by the production credit associations." Letter of August 3, 1956, to the writer from Edward D. Landels, Legislative Representative for the California Bankers Association. "Some time ago I inquired into the legislative history but didn't get far. One informant was under the impression that the sections had been sponsored by the Federal Land Bank or some other agency connected with the Farm Credit Administration." Letter of August 1, 1956, to the writer from E. H. Corbin, Vice President, Legal Department, Security-First National Bank of Los Angeles.

<sup>31</sup> See note 28 *supra*, at 342, 221 P.2d at 990.

seems logical to think of Section 2975 as the major provision, providing rules applicable to all cases, and Section 2974 as ancillary to it, providing additional special rules applicable to a more limited type of transaction. While the order of the sections might indicate the contrary, it is difficult to interpret their language in any other way.<sup>32</sup>

The second sentence of Section 2975 appears to provide that if a mortgage given to secure future advances states the maximum amount to be secured all advances, whether optional or obligatory, will be entitled to the same priority as that originally established by the mortgage so long as the total amount owing at any one time does not exceed the stated maximum. The question naturally arises as to what would be the legal effect of the mortgage if the maximum were not stated. Conceivably two views could be taken: one is that Section 2975 merely added to the law in existence in 1935; the other is that Section 2975 in effect repealed the prior law and substituted a new rule for it. If the former view were adopted the failure to state the maximum would merely result in application of the rules developed in earlier cases. As a practical matter this would mean that optional advances made after notice of intervening liens would be inferior to them. Failure to state the maximum amount to be secured would merely result in loss of priority for optional advances made after notice. However, if the other interpretation were accepted the consequences of failure to state the maximum amount might be quite different. One argument against acceptance of this interpretation is that the nature of such consequences is not suggested in the statute and would have to be left to conjecture. Another is that the first sentence of Section 2975 seems clearly to authorize mortgages for future advances in unqualified terms while the second sentence seems to relate the statement of maximum amount rather closely to the grant of absolute priority for optional advances. Thus the former interpretation seems the more logical one. In any event, the existing ambiguity should be eliminated.

The same question arises in interpreting Section 2974, but in a form which is slightly more difficult to resolve. The first sentence seems to provide that advances made to finance a mortgagor during one or more regular periods of production, under a mortgage of livestock, other animate chattels or crops, are entitled to priority even if optional. The second sentence provides that "Each such mortgage shall contain a statement that it is given for such purpose." The question here is what would be the consequences of failure to include such a statement in the mortgage? Conceivably these might be total invalidity of the mortgage, invalidity with respect to third persons, loss of priority on all future advances, loss of priority on optional advances made after actual notice of intervening liens, or something else. The choice of consequences under this interpretation would be both difficult and arbitrary. However, the second sentence might be read to mean that the special

<sup>32</sup> "It has always been my opinion that Section 2975 is the section dealing with chattel mortgages generally, and that Section 2974 was added to cover mortgages given to secure loans made for the purpose of financing a mortgagor during regular production periods. All chattel mortgages are subject to the provisions of Section 2975. However, if the mortgage is for the special purposes set forth in Section 2974, then the additional rights or benefits conferred by this section are available to the parties. In other words, Section 2974 is merely supplemental to Section 2975." Letter of October 10, 1956, to the writer from Percy A. Smith, attorney for the Production Credit Corporation, Federal Intermediate Land Bank and Bank for Cooperatives of Berkeley.

advantages of the first sentence—i.e., priority for optional advances—will be available to the parties only if such a statement appears in the mortgage. The effect of failure to include the statement would be to make the mortgage subject to the law existing apart from the statute. This interpretation is the better one and would be consistent with that developed above for Section 2975.<sup>33</sup> Again the existing ambiguity should be eliminated.

Assuming the validity of this approach to interpretation, the following paraphrase of Sections 2974 and 2975, arranged parallel to the language of the statutes, seems accurate:

#### Section 2975

1. A mortgage of personal property or crops may be given to secure the repayment of sums that may be advanced, expenditures that may be made, or indebtednesses or obligations that may be incurred subsequent to the execution of such mortgage.
2. If the maximum amount the repayment of which is proposed to be secured by such mortgage, is expressed therein (whether the creation of debts in such amount or any part thereof be optional with, or obligatory upon the mortgagee or assigns), such mortgage (subject to the provisions of sections 2911, 2941, 2968, 2969 and 2972 of the Civil Code) shall be and constitute a lien or encumbrance of rank, effect, status and standing equal to that established thereby initially and as it may thereafter obtain, as security for the repayment of any sums, expenditures, indebtednesses and obligations, owing or due or becoming owing or due thereunder, up to and including such expressed maximum amount which shall be considered only as a limit of the debts, sums, expenditures, indebtednesses and obligations that may be secured thereby at any one time, and not to include such as may have existed and been repaid or discharged thereunder.
3. A mortgage of personal property or crops shall also constitute a lien or encumbrance of rank, effect, status and standing equal to that established initially or thereafter obtained thereby, as security for the repayment of all sums or amounts that are necessarily advanced or expended by the mortgagee or assigns, for the

#### Paraphrase

1. A mortgage of personal property or crops may be given to secure future advances.
2. If the maximum loan to be secured is stated in the mortgage all advances, whether optional or obligatory, up to that amount are entitled to the same priority as that originally established by the mortgage. The stated maximum shall mean the maximum amount that may be owed at any time and shall not include any loans or advances under the mortgage that have already been discharged or repaid. If the maximum loan to be secured is not stated obligatory advances are entitled to the same priority as that originally established by the mortgage, but optional advances are not if made with actual notice of intervening liens.
3. Necessary expenditures made by the mortgagee in order to preserve his security shall be entitled to the same priority as that originally established by the mortgage, whether or not the maximum loan to be secured is stated.

<sup>33</sup> Mr. Percy A. Smith, in the letter cited in the previous footnote, suggests the same interpretation as that developed in the text. A similar approach was taken by the writer of the material on chattel mortgages in California Jurisprudence. See 10 CAL. JUR.2d, *Chattel Mortgages* §§ 14-17 (1953).

**Section 2975**

maintenance or preservation of the property, or any part thereof, described in such mortgage.

**Section 2974**

4. Where a mortgage of live stock, or other animate chattels, or crops is taken to secure mainly, or among other things, funds that may be advanced thereafter from the mortgagee or assigns at the option of either to the mortgagor, mortgagors or any of them, which funds to be advanced shall be for the purpose of financing the mortgagor, mortgagors or any of them during any regular production period or periods involving the property or any part thereof encumbered by or described in said mortgage, and during which period or periods the mortgagor, mortgagors or any of them, may need and request such financing, such mortgage shall be and continue to be (subject to the provisions of sections 2911, 2968, 2969 and 2972 of the Civil Code), until formally released or discharged in the recorder's office, a lien and encumbrance upon the property described therein, of status, effect, rank and standing equal to that established initially and thereafter obtained by such mortgage, as security for the repayment of all sums that may be or become due under such mortgage, and all obligations secured thereby,
5. [E]ven though during such period or periods of financing the debt or debts, obligation or obligations secured by such mortgage, as they exist at any particular time, may have been repaid in full to the mortgagee or assigns, from proceeds of sale of the mortgaged property, or otherwise by the mortgagor, mortgagors, or any of them.
6. Each such mortgage shall contain a statement that it is given for such purpose.
7. All such mortgages shall be discharged on demand of the mortgagor, in conformity with the provisions of section 2941 of the Civil Code, whenever no sums are owing to the mortgagee, or assigns, thereunder.

**Paraphrase**

4. If livestock, other animate chattels or crops are mortgaged for the purpose of financing the mortgagor during one or more regular production periods, advances made for that purpose shall be entitled to the same priority as that originally established by the mortgage, even though the advances are optional and even though made with actual notice of intervening liens.
5. Temporary balances in favor of the mortgagor, or temporary repayment in full of amounts owing under the mortgage, shall not extinguish the mortgage.
6. Unless a mortgage given to finance the mortgagor during a production period states that it is such a mortgage optional advances made after actual notice of intervening liens do not have priority over such liens.
7. When all sums owing under the mortgage are paid the mortgage shall be discharged on demand of the mortgagor, in conformity with the provisions of Section 2941 of the Civil Code.

## POSSIBLE REVISION

In this section problems which have appeared in the preceding discussion or which have been suggested by attorneys are examined and the possibility of statutory revision considered.

## Real Property

Any consideration of revision of the California law applicable to real property mortgages to secure future advances is met by the fact that the great weight of authority in other American jurisdictions and in England is on the side of the existing law.<sup>34</sup> Although there are major variations in a few of the states and minor variations in others<sup>35</sup> most conform to the analysis developed above. It would probably be unwise to change uniform settled rules in favor of what might appear in theory to be a more desirable approach without a thorough investigation of the consequences. Such an investigation would assume the proportions of a field study and lies outside the scope of the present report. The problems which might merit such a field study are set out below, together with some of the more obvious factors bearing on their solution.

As the law now stands optional future advances are inferior to liens as to which the mortgagee has actual notice when the advances are made, while obligatory advances have the same priority as that originally established by the mortgage. This distinction between optional and obligatory advances has been sufficiently troublesome to lead to a substantial amount of reported litigation.<sup>36</sup> Attempts to avoid this problem might assume either of two forms: abolition of the distinction or clarification of it in such a way as to make clear to one who consults the record whether advances are of one kind or another. The existing distinction between optional and obligatory advances could be abolished by giving both kinds of advance the same priority as that now enjoyed by obligatory advances, as one alternative, or optional advances, as the other. Either kind of action would make a significant change in the law.

If the priority of obligatory advances was reduced to that of optional advances institutions which finance building construction (in which mortgages for obligatory future advances are most frequently used) would be seriously affected. They might substitute a different financing device similar to the one used in Maryland in cases where maximum priority was desired.<sup>37</sup> However it is possible that banks would stop obliging themselves to make future advances in building construction loans, substituting either a simple mortgage for the full amount or an optional mortgage for future advances. In the former case the

<sup>34</sup> The cases are collected and discussed in 3 GLENN, MORTGAGES §§ 392-406.3 (1943); OSBORNE, MORTGAGES §§ 113-124 (1951); 4 AMERICAN LAW OF PROPERTY §§ 16.70-16.79 (Casner ed. 1952).

<sup>35</sup> See discussion in notes 6, 8, 10, 14, 15, 18 and 23 *supra*.

<sup>36</sup> *Pickling v. Jackson*, 203 Cal. 657, 265 Pac. 810 (1928); *Savings & L. Soc. v. Burnett*, 106 Cal. 514, 39 Pac. 922 (1895); *Willard v. National Supply Co.*, 51 Cal. App.2d 555, 125 P.2d 519 (1942); *Lumber & Builders Supply Co. v. Ritz*, 134 Cal. App. 607, 25 P.2d 1002 (1933); *Lanz v. First Mortgage Corp.*, 121 Cal. App. 587, 9 P.2d 316 (1932); *Yost-Linn Lumber Co. v. Williams*, 121 Cal. App. 571, 9 P.2d 324 (1932); *E. K. Wood Lumber Co. v. Mulholland*, 118 Cal. App. 475, 5 P.2d 669 (1931); *Atkinson v. Foote*, 44 Cal. App. 149, 186 Pac. 831 (1919); *Valley Lumber Co. v. Wright*, 2 Cal. App. 288, 84 Pac. 58 (1905). In some of these cases it is not clear whether the nature of the advances was litigated below, although in most it appears to have been an issue at the trial.

<sup>37</sup> See note 10 *supra*. This alternative might not be available since in *Smith v. Anglo-California Trust Co.*, 205 Cal. 496, 271 Pac. 898 (1928), a similar device was treated by the court as a mortgage to secure future advances.

undeniable advantages to the parties of a useful security device would have been lost. In the latter case the mortgagor would be placed in a difficult position since he would not be assured that future advances would be made when needed in order to continue with construction.

As an alternative it would be possible to give optional advances the same priority as that now given obligatory advances.<sup>38</sup> This is the effect of Sections 2974 and 2975 of the Civil Code in chattel security cases, and it might be argued that what works for chattel security should work equally well for real property security. However there are two important distinguishing considerations. One is that chattel security transactions are generally for a shorter term and serve different purposes than real property security. Chattel security is more a branch of commercial law than property law and thus not always susceptible to identical treatment. The other consideration is that different third parties are involved. In real property cases priority disputes involve purchasers, junior mortgagees, materialmen and mechanics, while in chattel security cases the third party is usually a purchaser, a junior mortgagee or judgment lienor.

The special considerations applicable to mechanics and materialmen seem especially relevant. To give optional future advances priority over their liens even after actual notice has been given could, in cases where the mortgagor becomes insolvent and the property secured is not sufficiently valuable to pay all lienors and debtors, result in serious loss to them. These, of course, are the cases where priority becomes important. It thus seems that any such rule might, in effect, make mechanics' and materialmen's liens less valuable than they now are. Since these persons are in a somewhat different position than lending institutions in their degree of familiarity with the legal problems involved, their access to counsel and particularly in their ability, as a practical matter, to refuse to provide labor, services and materials in cases which might appear to involve the risk of non-payment, such a rule might be thought unjust to them. When the advances are obligatory mechanics' and materialmen's liens are in no better position, but in those cases there is the advantage to them that the mortgagee *must* make additional advances. These funds in the hands of the mortgagor will presumably be available to pay their claims.<sup>39</sup>

It might also place the mortgagor in an undesirable position. Presumably a bank which would acquire no greater priority from obligatory advances than it would from optional ones would tend to restrict its practice to optional advances whenever possible. A mortgagor might then be refused advances by the mortgagee and find it difficult to obtain the money elsewhere since other lenders would be reluctant to rely on a lien which would be inferior to any subsequent advances

<sup>38</sup> The 1957 amendment to Code of Civil Procedure § 1188.1 (see note 3 *supra*) has made this change by giving the mortgagee priority to the extent that the advances, even though optional, are used in improving the land. In commenting on this legislation a banking official states: "This rule seems fair since the holder of the mechanics' lien participates in the increased value of the property even though his participation is subject to that of the lender." Letter of September 4, 1957, to the writer from Kenneth M. Johnson, Vice President and Counsel, Bank of America. Prior to this amendment the lienor, if the advance were optional, would have had an interest which was not subject to that of the lender.

<sup>39</sup> In *Smith v. Anglo-California Trust Co.*, 205 Cal. 496, 271 Pac. 898 (1928), the court required the mortgagee to hold funds not yet advanced available to satisfy claims of mechanics and materialmen when the mortgagor died, because the advances were obligatory.

the mortgagee might make. This would also make it possible for the original mortgagee to take advantage of the mortgagor's unfortunate position in various ways. Advances might be made only if higher interest was paid or if additional security was furnished, etc. Requiring the mortgage to state the maximum loan to be secured might limit this problem slightly, but it would always be possible for the parties to state a sufficiently high amount that the security value of the property in excess of it would be slight or even nonexistent.

The alternative procedure of clarifying the distinction between optional and obligatory future advances also presents difficulties. Legislation designed to achieve such clarification would have to be relatively complex and detailed since its objective would be to distinguish between advances that actually *were* obligatory or optional. This might be done by requiring that the parties, if they wish the advances to be treated as obligatory, agree on the precise amounts, times and conditions of all advances to be made under the mortgage. In order for this information to be helpful to third parties it would have to appear on the record, preferably in the mortgage itself. The effect on existing law would be obvious. Mortgages expressed to secure future advances would have to express the amounts to be advanced, as is not now the case.<sup>40</sup> The overstated present advance type of mortgage to secure future advances would, in effect, be abolished in all except cases in which the advances were optional.<sup>41</sup> Collateral oral agreements would not be admissible to establish the nature of the advances.<sup>42</sup> Presumably failure to meet the requirements of the statute would result in advances being considered optional for priority purposes. Assuming such legislation were acceptable to financing institutions and thus reasonably likely to be enacted the danger would remain that it might result in more confusion (although of a different kind) and litigation than under the present case law.

A related problem is created by the rule that allows collateral unrecorded agreements, oral or written, to be admitted to show that future advances were anticipated (in the overstated present advance situation) and to show the amounts, times and conditions of such advances. Some of the litigation about whether advances are optional or obligatory may be traced to the uncertainty and difficulty of proof this rule causes. It is conceivable that a statute requiring such details to appear in the mortgage or collateral recorded instrument would be useful. It might state that advances made after notice of intervening liens would be inferior to them unless the record showed that the advances were obligatory. Or it might limit consideration of the nature of the advances in priority disputes to the record, with the provision that advances not shown by the record to be obligatory should be declared optional (for purposes of priority). Neither approach would be satisfactory unless there were also some description of the statements in the mortgage or collateral recorded agreement which would result in the advances actually being obligatory, since presumably the purpose of varying the priority is to protect the mortgagee when he is under

<sup>40</sup> See note 6 *supra* and accompanying text.

<sup>41</sup> This would follow because of the requirement that the mortgage or collateral recorded instrument contain the full agreement of the parties.

<sup>42</sup> See note 16 *supra* and accompanying text.

a legal obligation to make the advances. This approach would raise the same group of problems as those discussed in the preceding paragraph and should not be adopted without the kind of field study there recommended.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that revision of the law in an attempt to abolish or clarify the distinction between optional and obligatory advances should not proceed without thorough study of the practical consequences to mortgagees, mortgagors and typical classes of intervening lienors. The recommendation is that in the absence of such studies no attempt be made to revise the law in this area.

Another problem is raised by the overstated present advance type of mortgage.<sup>43</sup> The problem is that the record does not and cannot show that future advances are contemplated, and consequently it seems unrealistic to expect an intervening encumbrancer to give actual notice to the mortgagee in such a way as to acquire priority over subsequent optional advances. This problem has been met in England, under the Law of Property Act of 1925,<sup>44</sup> by the provision that record notice is sufficient to establish priority over optional advances where the original mortgage does not show on the record that it is given to secure future advances. Such a rule would not appear to cause any great hardship to mortgagees since it would not affect their priorities in any way and would simply place the burden of examining the record on them in those cases in which the mortgage is for an overstated present advance with a collateral agreement that future advances will be optional. However, it is difficult to escape the reasoning, set out in several California cases,<sup>45</sup> that the overstatement cannot really harm the intervening lienor, especially since he can, and in most cases would, learn the details of the transaction by making inquiry of the mortgagee.<sup>46</sup> Thus though some such revision of the law appears logical and harmless it is not clear that it would serve any major useful purpose.

A final consideration is that any revision of the law affecting real property mortgages would presumably change the law applicable to mortgages of personal property and crops. This follows because of the conclusion reached above that except in the narrow area covered by Sections 2974 and 2975 of the Civil Code the same rules apply to both groups of cases.<sup>47</sup> For all these reasons the recommendation is that no revision be attempted at this time with respect to the law governing mortgages of real property to secure future advances.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See notes 17-23 *supra* and accompanying text.

<sup>44</sup> Discussed in FISHER & LIGHTWOOD, *MORTGAGE* 508-09 (7th ed. 1931).

<sup>45</sup> *Tapia v. Demartini*, 77 Cal. 383, 19 Pac. 641 (1888); *Tully v. Harloe*, 35 Cal. 302, 95 Am. Dec. 102 (1868).

<sup>46</sup> It would also be possible for a junior lienor to send stop notices to superior mortgagees of record in all cases. While this might be a practical way of insuring the maximum available priority it would tend in some cases to be the kind of idle and useless act that the law should not require. And it would still not help the prospective lienor learn from the record the details which might help him decide whether he wants to extend credit at all.

<sup>47</sup> See note 33 *supra* and accompanying text.

<sup>48</sup> Copies of an earlier draft of this study were distributed to a number of qualified persons for their comments. They uniformly agreed with the conclusion here stated. At the same time members of the California Bankers Association were asked by their counsel, Mr. J. F. Shuman of the firm of Morrison, Foerster, Holloway, Shuman & Clark, to examine this study and express their views concerning the desirability of extending the principle of Civil Code §§ 2974 and 2975 to real property mortgages. In his letter of November 19, 1957, to the writer, Mr. Shuman reported that: "The opinion is practically unanimous . . . ; no bank favored making Sections 2974 and 2975 of the Civil Code applicable to real property mortgages. Several banks expressed the view that perhaps the subject should have further investigation, but no bank recommended any change for the present . . ."



### Personal Property

In considering revision of the law relating to mortgages of chattels to secure future advances no such uniformity is encountered as that which exists in the real property cases. Only one jurisdiction in the United States has statutes similar in language to Sections 2974 and 2975.<sup>49</sup> The major problem is that of clarity. The existing statutes are unclear in meaning and effect. It seems desirable to revise them in such a way as to remove major doubts about their meaning and clarify their relation to the law in existence when they were enacted. The following recommendations are based on the interpretation of Sections 2974 and 2975 of the Civil Code developed above.<sup>50</sup>

Section 2974 appears to be the major offender, but the evidence indicates that it is not frequently used by lending institutions.<sup>51</sup> This fact, coupled with the conclusion that all cases falling under Section 2974 could also be covered by Section 2975, would seem to justify repeal of the section. A possible objection is that under Section 2975 the maximum amount to be secured must be stated in order to secure full priority for optional future advances. Under Section 2974 this is not necessary. However, assuming that Section 2974 is seldom used this consideration seems unimportant. Section 2974 also provides that temporary balances in favor of the mortgagor or temporary repayment in full of amounts owing under the mortgage shall not extinguish the mortgage. It is arguable that the prior case law established a similar rule for *all* such mortgages and that repeal of Section 2974 would thus not remove it from the law. This matter is further discussed below. The recommendation is that Section 2974 be repealed.

Section 2975 should be retained in substance but it could be improved a great deal by rephrasing. In addition at least one troublesome problem of interpretation could be avoided by enacting as part of Section 2975 the rule of *Frank H. Buck Co. v. Buck*,<sup>52</sup> which was included in Section 2974 but omitted from Section 2975. This has to do with the result of a temporary repayment in full of the mortgage. It is common

<sup>49</sup> Arizona has statutes enacted in 1941 which are almost identical with Sections 2974 and 2975 of the California Civil Code. Presumably the California legislation was used as a model by the Arizona legislature. See ARIZ. REV. STAT. §§ 33-771 to 33-773 (1956). For a collection of state laws and summaries of court decisions see 1, 2 CCH CONDE. SALE—CHAT. MORT. REP. *passim*.

Article 9 of the Uniform Commercial Code, dealing with commercial security transactions, includes two sections (9-304 and 9-312) applicable to chattel security for future advances. Legislation based on Article 9 was before the 1957 Legislature (S.B. 1402) but failed to pass. It can be expected that similar bills will be introduced in the future.

Because Article 9 embodies an integrated approach to security transactions different from that of the present California law it seemed unwise to consider §§ 9-304 and 9-312 as possible models for revising §§ 2974 and 2975 of the Civil Code. Piecemeal adoption of bits and pieces of Article 9 would tend toward confusion, rather than clarity. See generally UNIFORM COMMERCIAL CODE Art. 9; Cooper, *New Wines and New Bottles: The Uniform Commercial Code and the California Law of Chattel Security*, 27 SO. CALIF. L. REV. 265 (1954).

<sup>50</sup> See notes 25-33 *supra* and accompanying text.

<sup>51</sup> "With respect to Section 2974; although this Section has been in the Code for many years, my experience is that the banks and other financial institutions made very little use of it. Section 2975 is used almost exclusively. I, personally, have never drawn a mortgage pursuant to Section 2974. I use Section 2975 exclusively. I have never had a request from the California Bankers Association since the Section was adopted for a form of mortgage under it to be given to any of its member banks. I have, however, over the years prepared several forms of mortgage under Section 2975 for use by members of the Association.

I have talked with Mr. Kenneth Johnson, Esq., General Counsel for the Bank of America, and he tells me his bank makes very little use of Section 2974." Letter of July 30, 1956, to the writer from J. F. Shuman of Morrison, Foerster, Holloway, Shuman & Clark, counsel for the California Bankers Association.

<sup>52</sup> 162 Cal. 300, 122 Pac. 466 (1912).

for mortgages of this type to be given on a kind of "open account" basis with the amount owing fluctuating widely depending on the needs and the often seasonal income of the mortgagor. This is particularly true when the mortgagee acts as marketing agent for the mortgagor and credits the proceeds of sale to the account secured. Uncertainty as to the effect of temporary repayment of all outstanding sums has led to the practice, in some lending institutions, of purposely leaving a small balance owing in order to avoid inadvertently discharging the mortgage by payment before the parties intend it to be extinguished. Prior to the 1935 legislation it was held in the *Buck* case that temporary payment in full did not discharge the mortgage, but enactment of a similar provision in Section 2974, while omitting any reference to the problem in Section 2975, has caused uncertainty. On the theory that the 1935 legislation merely added to the existing law and did not completely replace it, one can logically argue that the rule of the *Buck* case is still in effect. However, enactment of a similar provision in the new Section 2975 would remove all doubt about the matter.

Another problem is the effect under Section 2975 of failure to state the maximum amount owing. The interpretation developed above, to the effect that in such a case the law independent of the statute would govern, seems logical.<sup>53</sup> However it might be thought desirable to include in any recommended revision of the law some statement which would remove doubt about the matter. The following proposal for a revision of Section 2975 attempts to meet these requirements. The proposed statutory language appears in italics and comments concerning the purpose or meaning of each provision in Roman type.

*Mortgages of personal property or crops may be given to secure future advances.* This appears to convey the meaning of the first sentence of the present statute in fewer words. *If the maximum amount to be secured is stated in the mortgage the lien for all advances to that amount, whether optional or obligatory, has the same priority as that originally established by the mortgage.* This is a restatement in shorter and clearer form of part of the second sentence of Section 2975. There is no intention to change the meaning. Thus "has the same priority as" seems to say as much as "shall be and constitute a lien or encumbrance of rank, effect, status, and standing equal to." And "that originally established by the mortgage" should mean at least as much as "that established thereby initially and as it may thereafter obtain." *If the maximum amount to be secured is not stated the lien for all optional advances made after actual notice of intervening liens is inferior to them in priority.* This is the rule which existed prior to 1935 and which, under the interpretation developed above, survived enactment of Sections 2974 and 2975. It is stated here in order to remove any existing uncertainty. *The stated maximum shall mean the maximum amount secured at any time and does not include amounts already discharged or repaid.* This is a restatement of the last part of the second sentence and is not intended to change the meaning. *Repayment in full of amounts owing under the mortgage does not extinguish the mortgage.* This provision is the equivalent of a similar one in Section 2974. It is added here in order to clarify the law on the theory that the rule

<sup>53</sup> See note 33 *supra* and accompanying text.

established in the *Buck* case survived the enactment of Sections 2974 and 2975 in 1935. *Necessary expenditures made by the mortgagee to preserve the security constitute liens having the same priority as that originally established by the mortgage.* This is the rule under the cases for real property mortgages<sup>54</sup> and it was formerly contained in the last sentence of Section 2975. It is continued here in briefer and clearer form.

<sup>54</sup> *Savings & L. Soc. v. Burnett*, 106 Cal. 514, 39 Pac. 922 (1895).

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