

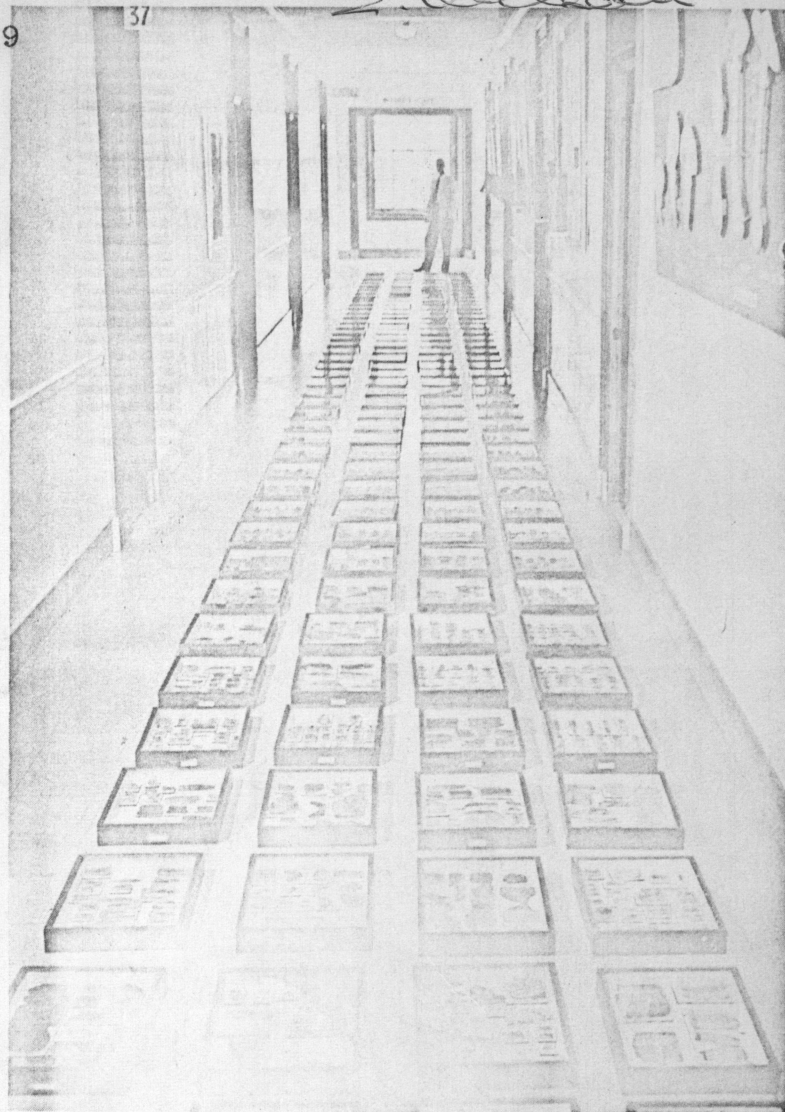
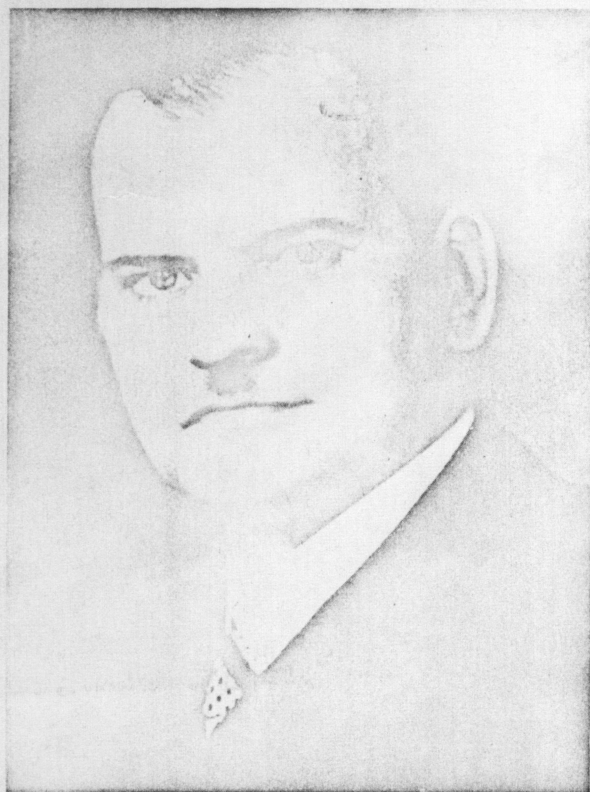
P. T. FURST

# The Oligocene World of Georg Statz

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

THE LIVES AND LABORS of few insects have so gripped man's interest and imagination as those of the common honey bee. The incredibly efficient social organization of the hive has been fascinating through the ages. The economic importance of the bee to man—from his earliest primitive days to the atomic present—and to plants has hardly an equal in the insect world.

It is no wonder that any discovery of bees of the distant geological past brings joy to students of insect life. Unfortunately, fossils of quite early bee forms are not common. Only about half a dozen localities for fossil bees are known, most of them in western Europe. The oldest known geological specimens of the honey bee were discovered imprisoned in amber from the East Prussian coast. Such finds are very rare, but at least one was known to the Romans, whose poet Mar-



tial composed a special ode to such an amber bee in which he suggested that she looked as though imprisoned in her own nectar. Surely, he exclaimed, that is precisely the death she would have wished for!

Other bee fossils from the Eocene, Oligocene, and Miocene have been found in western Germany and in the French Provence.

Undoubtedly the most important fossil collection of bees which did their buzzing in the swampy tropical forests of the Oligocene around 35,000,000 years ago comes from a place called Rott, in the Siebengebirge (Seven Mountains) of the West German Rhineland. As early as 1907 two of the fossil bees from Rott, one owned by the Harvard Museum and the other by the British Museum, were described by T. D. A. Cockerell as *Synopsis dormitans* and *S. henrici*, respectively.

But it remained for a German schoolteacher named Georg Statz really to enrich our knowledge of the little honey bee of the past. For more than a quarter century Statz collected tirelessly in the Rott deposits, amassing and classifying an enormous collection of

Part of the Statz Collection at the Los Angeles County Museum, with Dr. Fred Truxal. (P. T. Furst)  
◀ Dr. Georg Statz. (Los Angeles County Museum)