From the Taung Dynasty in China of the Tenth Century comes a statue of Buddha to Avery Island.

A unique Jungle Garden tops one of the salt domes of Louisiana, Avery Island, which rises suddenly from the flat marshland near New Iberia. The garden was the creation of the late Edward Avery McIlhenny, who collected rare plants from the Upper Nile, Japan, and many other nations.

It has a small lake and “Bird City” in which bamboo nests furnish sanctuary for more than 20,000 birds, mostly egrets.

In the center of the garden, a mysterious antique Buddha holds court in an empty Shinto shrine, its origin lost in its antiquity.

The dome on which this garden and “Bird City” is located, is one of five major salt domes of the 130 in Louisiana. These domes, sometimes called the “Five Islands of Louisiana,” stretch from New Iberia southeasterly to the Gulf of Mexico. It is a widely accepted theory that these domes extend at least 20 thousand feet below the surface in Louisiana and Texas.

Salt production in Louisiana began during the War Between the States, with the discovery of rock salt in 1862. This was the first rock salt discovery in the United States and immediately work was begun in mining to supply salt for the Confederate Army.

Because of their astounding depth, Louisiana’s salt domes are mined with the “room and pillar” method. This means that the mines are worked in such a manner that the roof, sidewalls and supporting pillars are all of rock salt, with no other supports needed. By using dynamite to blast, the miners carve out huge rooms and galleries that measure as much as 75 by 75 feet. These rooms and passageways are so extensive that the men ride through the mines in jeeps and trucks, and heavy construction machinery is used to transport the salt as it is blasted loose.

Winter or summer, the temperature within the salt mines remains a constant 72 degrees, producing ideal working conditions. The air is dustless, clean, free of gases, and dry, and there is no hazard of roof falls or cave-ins.

Louisiana produces the purest rock salt in the country.