

# The Isthmus

One strip of land  
that defines us  
and guides us

By SCOTT MILFRED

A 1,600-foot-tall glacier carved the Madison Isthmus 20,000 years ago, geologists tell us.

Since then, the narrow land between lakes Mendota and Monona has been a favorite spot for American Indians, fur traders, early settlers and eventually the leaders of Wisconsin government.

The Ho-Chunk found the Isthmus an ideal place to grow corn between two abundant fishing holes. After the U.S. government forced the Ho-Chunk to

leave, James Duane Doty bought about 1,200 acres of the Isthmus in 1836 for \$1,500.

That amount might get you one month in a Downtown condo today. The Isthmus remains so popular that the average lakefront home is assessed at about \$700,000.

Yet blue-collar workers built plenty of smaller homes on the Isthmus over the years, and UW-Madison students spread into parts. The hippies invaded in the 1960s and '70s, and later yuppies



