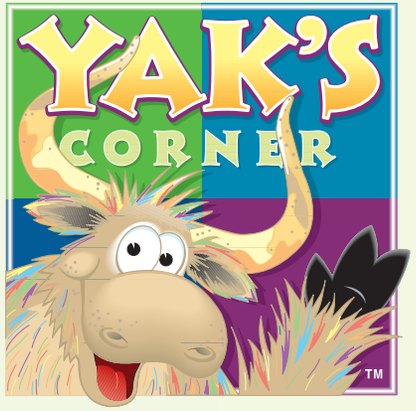
This is the Yak's last story in celebration of Michigan Week, which ends Monday.

STATE FLAG SAYS IT ALL FOR MICHIGAN



The Yak's quest for the first 11 state symbols took him to state parks, nature preserves, an old-growth forest, an orchard, a beach and a river.

But his last adventure was different because Michigan's 12th symbol can't be found in nature. It's the Michigan State Flag. And it's really two symbols in one because it includes the State Coat of Arms, the 13th symbol, which also appears on the State Seal, the 14th symbol. (The seal, or official stamp, is used on many official state documents.)

But it's the coat of arms that counts. Without it, all that would be left of the flag is the color blue; all that would be on the seal are the words "The Great Seal of the State of Michigan, A.D. MDCCCXXXV." (Those final letters are the roman numerals for 1835, the year the seal was adopted.)

The flag — Michigan's third since becoming a state — was adopted in 1911. The current coat of arms was adopted at the same time, but its basic elements date to 1835, including a Latin saying that means "I will defend" and several mini-symbols: an elk, a moose, an eagle, a peninsula, a lake and a tiny man with a gun.

A gun?

"The gun and 'I will defend' had real meaning in 1835," said Sandra Clark, director of the Michigan Historical Center.

That year, Michigan troops almost fought a battle against Ohio. Tensions were growing between the United States and British Canada, and many people remembered the occupation of Detroit by British troops just 23 years earlier.

"We weren't thinking of Great Britain and Canada as we do today — as best friends," she said. "And, of course, guns were how people got their food then."

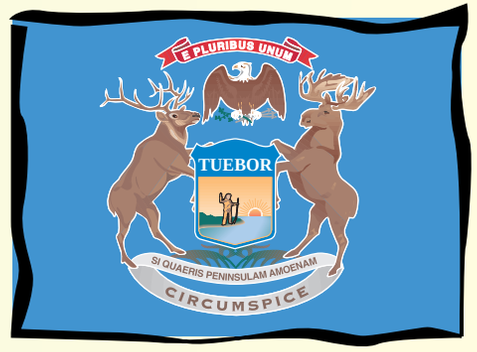
The eagle is a symbol of the United States. Clutching both arrows and an olive branch, its message seems clear: "We love peace, but if forced we will defend ourselves."

The elk and moose are both Michigan natives.

Earlier coats of arms had several other mini-symbols, including a ship, a mine, a farmer plowing, a train and logs floating down a river.

Michigan forever! Stay strong.

By Patricia Chargot



Michigan's Coat of Arms was inspired by the 17th Century coat of arms of the Hudson's Bay Company, one of the earliest and largest fur-trading companies in North America. The Latin sayings mean: "From Many, One," "I Will Defend" and "If You Seek a Pleasant Peninsula, Look About You."

Adults can order and buy a 3-foot by 5-foot Michigan flag at www.mich.gov/doingbusiness.