

Fighting dampness

Try drying out for winter

By NANCY HOSKIN

After having had an unusually wet summer, with flooded basements and family rooms, now is the time to get the excess moisture out of your home before cold temperatures set in for the winter.

With many homes in this part of Canada without air conditioners or dehumidifiers, it is wise to use this time to go through those deep closets and drawers, damp basement storage areas and root out the forgotten boxes of books and clothes. Empty these areas to dry things out while you figure out what to do with the mold and musty smells.

Mold or mildew is a living thing, a fungus whose spores are everywhere. Fungus is a kind of plant that has no green color, chlorophyll, and cannot make it without the help of an organic host. It

colonizes matter which is alive, or which has organic material in it. Fungus spores are so tiny that they are impossible to see without a microscope, but they are out there, floating in the air, circling, just waiting for warm moist places to land.

You cannot wipe out all the fungus spores in the world, but you can do something about the conditions in which they thrive. You can lower humidity.

In basements and crawl spaces you can isolate stored goods from dampness by covering walls or floors with four millimeters of polyethylene, available in rolls at hardware and building supply stores.

Do as much as you can to increase the ventilation. Be sure existing vents remain unblocked, and if possible, keep a door or window open.

Clean all washable surfaces in the area with a mold or mildew cleaner.

Before putting your goods back in the newly cleaned and aired out storage space, invest in some kind of insurance against future dampness.

Dehumidifiers are available at your local hardware store and are priced between \$239 and \$299. Another form of insurance is also available. For about \$7 you can get a dehumidifier in a jar. It is a plastic container with water-absorbing crystals, a calcium chloride crystal that soaks up 15 times its own volume in moisture.

When buying a new camera or suede boots, for example, you usually find a packet of these crystals doing the same job, keeping the moisture out. These crystals are available at hardware stores and home centers.

Check the jar every few months and pour out the accumulated moisture. They can be placed in all areas that attract moisture, bathrooms, closets, basements and garages, but keep them out of the reach of young children. Each jar lasts approximately eight months.

There are other methods of extracting dampness and water out of rooms.

"You can use a rug shampoo

machine without adding the water you normally would. It will suck up excess moisture, as will a Shop Vac, which is a vacuum to be used when cleaning up something wet or dry," explained Jackie Sneek, owner of Markham's Pro Hardware.

Another product Mrs. Sneek recommended are Nil Odor Drops which are available in either a spray or drop form and take the musty smell out of any room.

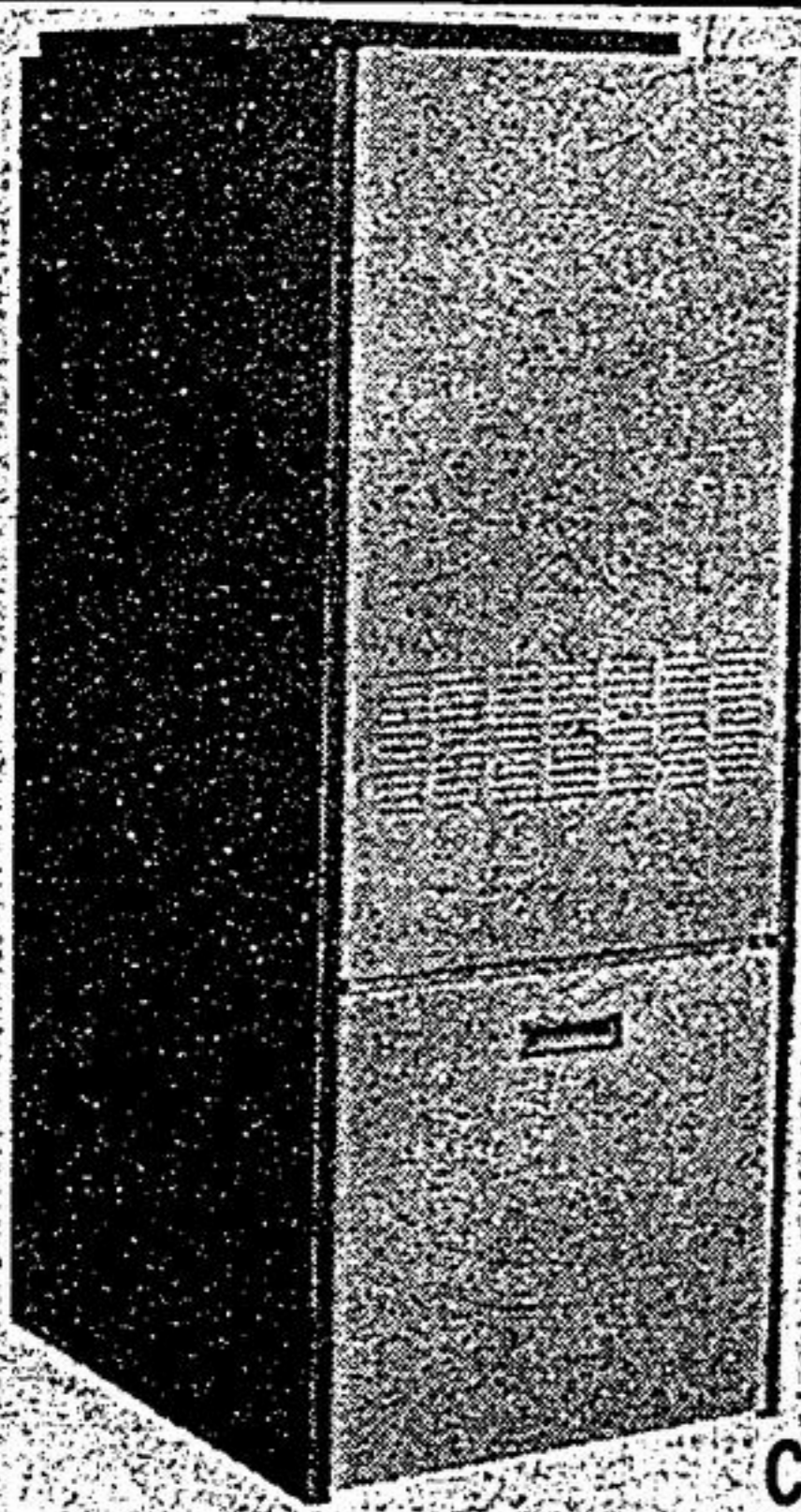
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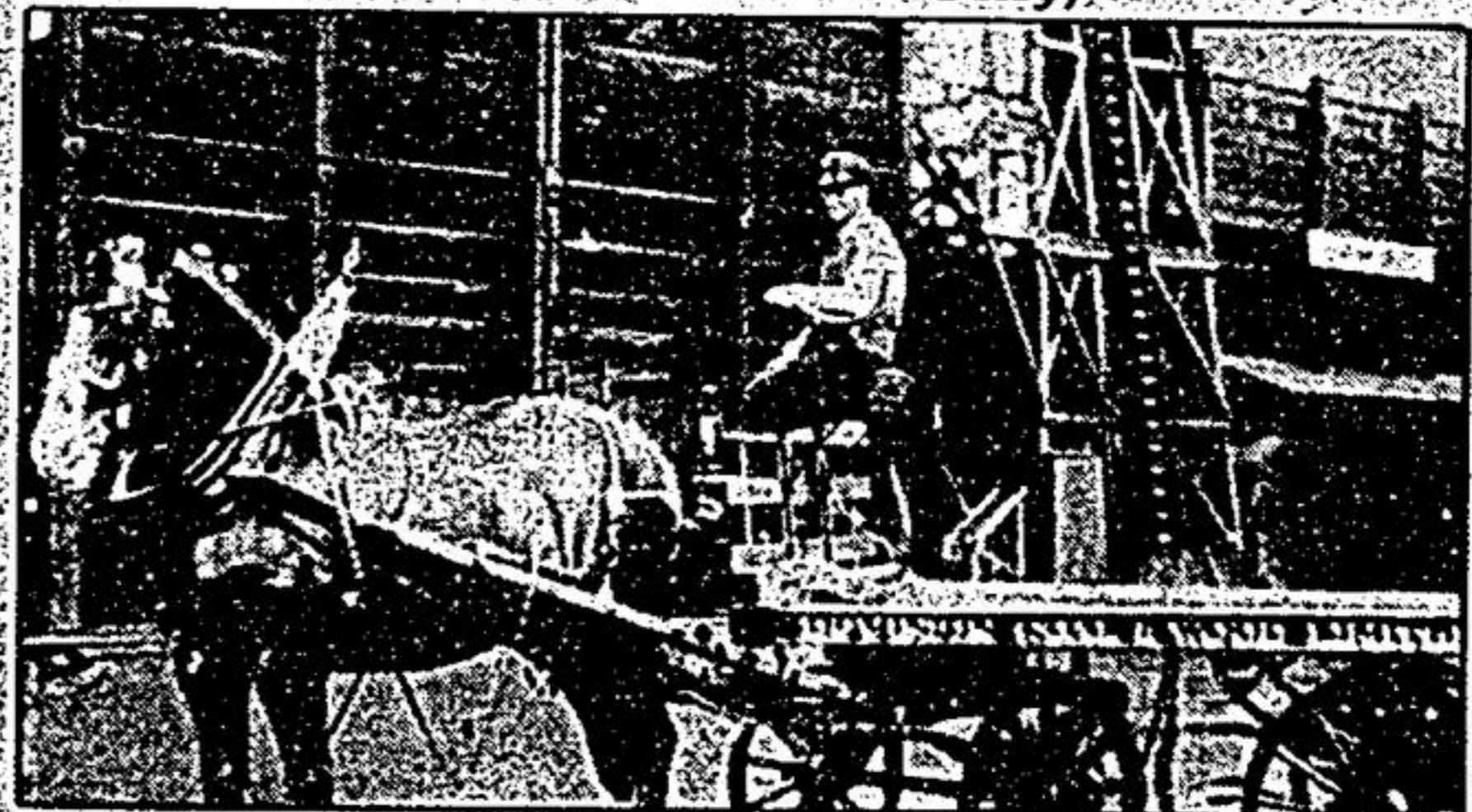
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