

HOME & GARDEN

It's almost time to close the cottage for the winter

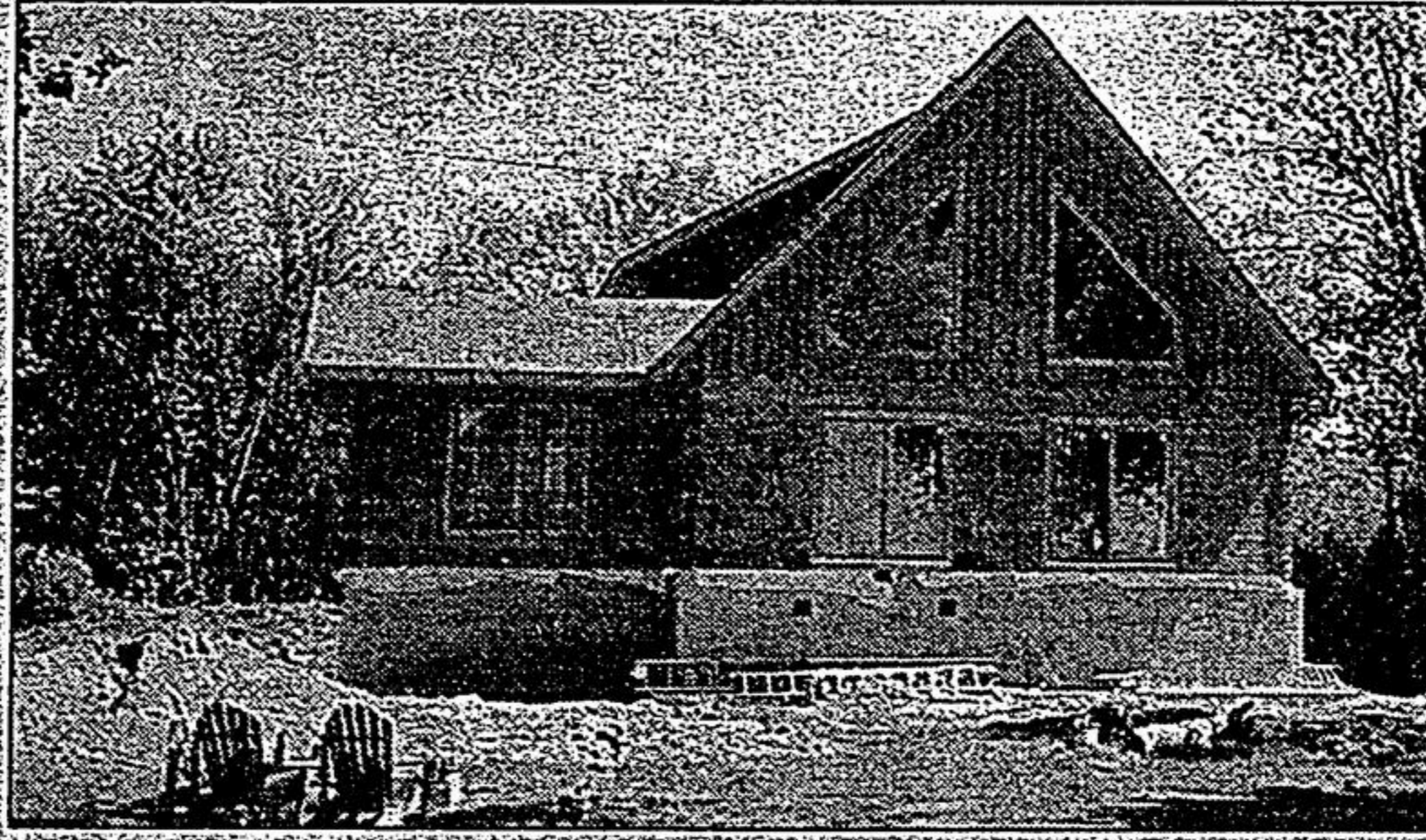
Some people like to secure their cottage like a vault; others prefer to create that lived-in look

It's that time of year again. The leaves are falling, the nights are cold and it's time to close down the cottage for the winter.

For a variety of reasons, many cottagers close up their cottage for the winter season. There are always feelings of regret when you leave the great escape for a period of time, especially for city dwellers. But, equally strong, are the fears of damage and vandalism most cottage owners feel when closing up for the winter.

There are two schools of thought on how to protect your cottage when you leave it. You can secure it like a vault or you can leave the place virtually open since less damage will be done on forced entry.

Regardless of which school you follow, always leave a note on the front door giving a local phone number though which you can be reached. This way, if the roof collapses or the place is vandalized, a passerby can inform you if they wish.



Some people like to board up their cottage's windows with plywood to prevent people from getting inside. It will also prevent birds and tree branches from crashing into the windows.

Before anything else, decide how much you will take with you or leave behind. Some people like to leave their cottage in a live-in condition for immediate use come spring. Others take with them almost anything that's reasonably mobile.

TO TAKE OR NOT TO TAKE

Hide away or remove any sharp items or destructive tools such as knives, axes, saws, crowbars and hammers. These may aid vandals in damaging the place.

Fire extinguishers can also cause a mess, but could be valuable in case of a fire. Use your best judgment in deciding whether to take them or leave them behind.

Stereos, televisions and other electronic equipment are more valuable to thieves than other furniture items. Take any valuable audio-visual equipment home with you.

SAFETY MEASURES

It is almost impossible to make a cottage super safe, but here are some more measures to consider.

Covering the windows with plywood may not completely discourage forced entries, but the plywood will protect the cottage from birds, flying branches and other objects. Try purchasing damaged plywood sheets which are less costly and serve the same purpose.

Don't just close down the water system, drain it. This will prevent pipes from cracking and breaking over the winter. Draining the system involves emptying and cleaning all the pipes, valves, tanks and pumps.

If you have hot water, turn the power off both at the tank and at the circuit breaker before draining. Put some anti-freeze in the toilet bowl in case all the water hasn't drained.

To ensure that the stove, fridge and other electrical equipment are not used in your absence, remove the fuses and hide them in a safe place. This means cleaning and emptying the fridge

first. Place a wooden cap on the chimney. This will not only discourage birds and small animals from entering, but also stop any rain or snow.

If your cottage is in an area that gets heavy snow, consider installing temporary supports to protect the roof from caving in.

You'll need some expert advice to install roof supports. Another option is to hire a reliable local person to shovel the roof when necessary.

Store non-perishable items, especially anything mice might eat, in metal containers.

Store boat motors, lawnmowers and other items with engines in a dry, weather-proof place. Coat with oil anything that may rust over the winter.

Before leaving, make a list of tools and supplies you'll need when opening the cottage in the spring.

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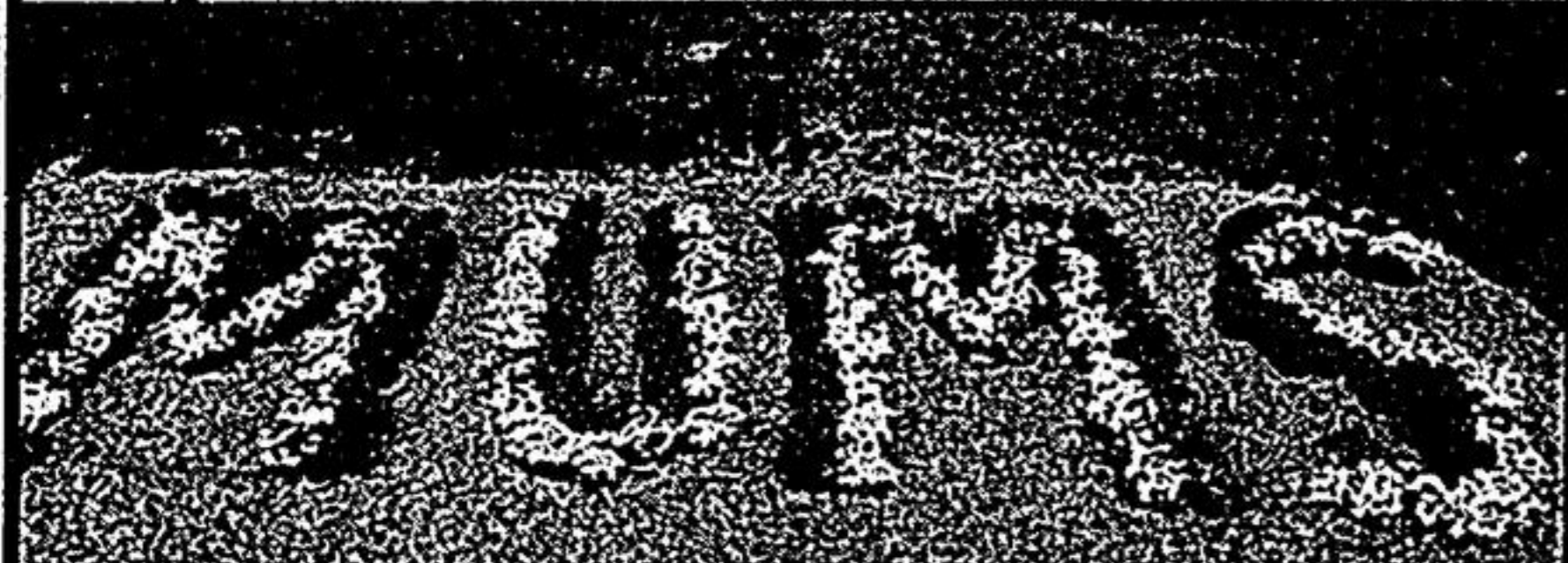
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