

Kellidoor, Arctic Entry — Siinaq

CUUMI, SIINAMI TAANGAPET PUCKAANI ETAALLRIIT. – BEFORE, IN THE KELLIDOR WE KEPT OUR WATER IN BARRELS.



Photo: Kellidoor on a house in Karluk, 1950s.
Courtesy of Tim and Norman Smith.

In northern climates where people rely on heavy clothing, stored foods, and sophisticated technologies for survival, storing one's supplies is always a concern. Northern peoples manage this problem by creating special storage areas in their homes.

In addition to piling supplies along the walls and filling the rafters with dried fish, Alutiiq people once used their entryways to keep belongings safe and dry. Most sod houses had a small entry, an antechamber known today as a kellidoor. In prehistoric times, these chambers were wide tunnels leading from the main room of the house to the outdoors. In later times, when people added western-style doors to their homes, the kellidoor was more like a small room, similar to a modern entry room. A smart craftsman made sure the door to this small room opened inward. Then, when it snowed, his family would not be trapped inside!

Historic sources indicate that Alutiiq people stored outer garments and barrels of berries, oil, and dried fish in the kellidoors of their sod houses. Today many Alutiiq homes continue to have kellidoors. These are often small plywood shelters added to the back of the house. These rooms contain modern versions of the traditional kellidoor items, including coats and rain gear, Xtratufs, and often a freezer stocked with fish, berries, and deer meat. The kellidoor is also where polite guests leave their muddy shoes.