

Door — Amiik

AMIK PATUMAUQ. – THE DOOR IS CLOSED.



Photo: Sod house in Karluk, ca. 1889, courtesy of the National Archives Albatross Collection.

Alutiiq people once entered their sod houses through low, narrow passageways—or entrance tunnels. The door to this tunnel was about three feet square and usually faced the nearest waterway. A piece of seal or sea lion skin tied to the posts framing the doorway covered the opening and could be tied shut to protect from wind and rain.

The doorway led to a narrow, sunken tunnel. Historic accounts indicate that people crouched or crawled through the tunnel to enter their homes. This small inconvenience had an important purpose. It kept houses warm. A tunnel with a deep floor trapped cold air and helped keep heated air inside. The entry passage led to the heart of the house. Inside similar but shorter passageways linked the main room of the house to smaller side rooms used for sleep, bathing, and storage. Here again, the floor of the tunnel was lower than the floor of the adjacent rooms, to help retain heat.

At an ancestral village in Karluk, researchers studied a complete entrance tunnel. The three-foot-wide passage had six sturdy posts and walls and floor lined with planks, and it extended about

nine feet toward Shelikof Strait.