

**The Red Star Line Museum: collecting personal stories and migration heritage
With a case study of our next exhibition: 'Remembering roots: Belgian Argentineans
and their family stories'**

Lien Vloeberghs
Researcher at the Red Star Line Museum
Antwerp, Belgium

Abstract

The Red Star Line Museum was founded in 2013 in the original buildings of the shipping company 'Red Star Line'. The company transported more than 2 million passengers, mostly third class migrants, from the harbor of Antwerp to North America between 1873 and 1934. The museum buildings were once used for the medical control and disinfection of the migrants before shipping. The museum searches and collects stories of Red Star Line passengers and brings the stories 'back' to the place where they were once in transit. Together with our public we enlarge our collection of migration stories every day, on both sides of the ocean. These stories make our collection mostly immaterial, but we also harbor material collections (photos, migration objects, letters,...). We don't limit ourselves to the past. We collect stories of immigrants and refugees today too.

In this lecture, I would like to present our museum and our work with material and immaterial migration heritage. How can we, as a museum, play a role in remembering, the discourse on migration and the processes of identity and integration?

As a case study, I would like to present our upcoming exhibition about Argentineans of Belgian descent. Antwerp was also a stop on the routes to South America. Our museum is tellingly located in the 'Montevideo street' because the docks where South American goods were unloaded, are near. For Belgians, Argentina was the most popular destination in South America. Between 1857 and 1924, about 24.000 Belgians entered Buenos Aires. Hundreds more arrived before and after the Second World War. We travelled to Argentina to interview some of their descendants about the stories of their (grand)parents, while others were children themselves when they migrated. How do they remember the migration? How do they keep the family story alive? What do these stories still mean to them today? And how does that shift between generations?