

Red Star Line: Bridge to a safe Home

Nadia Babazia and Marie-Charlotte Le Bailly
Red Star Line Museum Antwerp

Abstract

With their whole life packed in a few suitcases, millions of people sailed from Europe to America after 1800. The United States and Canada were the promised land for fortune seekers and everyone looking for a better life. For many emigrants, the trip to the New World began in buildings of the Red Star Line in Antwerp, where they underwent medical examinations and administrative checks and their baggage was disinfected. Red Star Line ocean steamers paved the way to a new life for about two million men, women and children between 1873 and 1934. Their story, that of the shipping company which transported them and that of the city and the harbour from which they left are central elements in the main exhibition of the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp. The era in which the exodus took place is placed in a broad social context. Migration and human mobility have always existed: millions of people all over the world left (and continue to leave) the familiar behind, looking for a new future. **The Red Star Line (and its buildings) symbolizes the bridge to this new future, in the past and in the present.**

The Red Star Line Museum has started up two projects evolving around refugees in the past and in the present. In two separate papers Nadia Babazia and Marie-Charlotte Le Bailly will present these projects, which symbolize **Red Star Line as a bridge to a safe home**. The first project is a co-creative oral history project that aims at collecting the testimonies of refugee children to Belgium from the Second World War until now (the period of living memory). The museum envisions a project with input from refugee communities. 'Field workers' will be trained as interviewers and intermediaries between the museum and those communities. The project also focuses on descendants of refugees, and how they process that part of their family's history.

The second project involves research about 'Albert Einstein – The Refugee'. Einstein travelled several times with the Red Star Line, amongst which his flight from Nazi Germany to the United States in 1933. This project will look into this crucial period of Einstein's life and the role he played in securing the lives of colleagues and friends. This project will result in an exhibition and publication.