

George Steuart & Co Commences Restoration Of Centuries Old Artifacts



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George Steuart & Co, Sri Lanka's oldest mercantile establishment has commenced an exciting project to restore a repository of artifacts that trace back to its founding in 1835 and its early operations. The recently uncovered artifacts include diaries and journals belonging to the founders, ledgers, profit and loss accounts, company seals, employment records and many more documents from the early 1800s. The restoration is being conducted under the careful guidance and expertise of the National Library and Documentation Services Board Sri Lanka in order to preserve and archive the rare collection.

Of particular interest is a collection of documents that belonged to the three founding brothers of George Steuart & Co, Captain James Steuart, Joseph Steuart and George Steuart, who first sailed to Ceylon in 1806. The records pertaining to the company itself offer a rare glimpse into the day to day workings of mercantile Ceylon during the Empire. There is evidence of George Steuarts preeminence within the economy of the time, including its enrolment as the first member of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. Included in the restoration are a trove of items of historic interest such as monetary notes and coins the company had used in the 17th century, correspondence with officials in Britain, furniture, books and journals with handwritten notes that offer a first-hand glimpse into the establishment of the early commercial ventures, a handful of which continue in some form to this date. The collection also comprises newspapers from the 1800s as well as first editions of poetry books and lithographs that depict reflections of early Ceylon by travelers and merchants.



Sonala Gunawardana, Chairman of the National Library and Documentation Services Board under whose guidance the project has been initiated expressed, "It is a delight and an honor to be involved in the restoration of the George Steuart collection of artifacts. A collection such as this adds rich detail to our knowledge of how early Ceylon functioned. There is a great necessity to find, restore and archive artifacts of this nature in order to have a more thorough understanding of the building blocks of our socioeconomic history. It is admirable that over the centuries, George Steuart & Co has maintained this collection through the many changes that have taken place in the nation as well as in the company. We hope more companies with similar heritage will partner with us to preserve their archives."