John Thomas Keating

John Thomas Keating was born at Sydney, and educated at Fort Street School.[1]
His parents were Patrick & Catherine Keating.

After schooling he commenced working with the Department of Lands, around
1873, as a cadet in Head Office. He held various positions there up until 1890.[2]

In 1889 the New South Wales state government had established a new Land
(Appeal) Court under the provisions of the Crown Lands Act 1889. The court
first met on 3rd March 1890 in the old civil courtroom at Darlinghurst. The first
ever court registrar was Mr J. T. Keating.[3] This appointment was confirmed in
the March' Government Gazette.[4] His annual salary for this new position was
£500 per annum.[5]

In April 1892 Keating, in his position as registrar, wrote to the editor of the
SMH defending the proficiency of the Land Court. It had been alleged, in an
earlier letter to the editor that appeals to the Supreme Court challenging
decisions of the Land Court had in half the instances been reversed by the
Supreme Court. Keating advised that there had in fact been fifteen appeals to
the Supreme Court and only five of these had been reversed, the other decisions
had all been upheld.[6]

Whilst he was registrar to the Land Court Keating was also appointed secretary
to the first Federal Capital Commission in 1899.[7]

In 1902 Keating was appointed to the position of Acting Chairman for the
Orange Land Board. Up until that time he had held the position of registrar to
the Land Court since its inception in 1890. When the land Court met in July
1902 the President, Mr A. Oliver, praised Keating for his skills as a draftsman
& officer. He went on to note that "*The readiness with which he had acquired
the details of the intricate technical matters that had come before the Court had
been astonishing.*" He also added that "*He felt a deep sense of regret at losing
Mr Keating….*" and "*that whatever sphere Mr Keating was called upon to
occupy it would be to his own credit and the advantage of the state.*"[8] There was

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[1] Sydney Morning Herald. 12th October 1920, p8 (ex Trove).
[2] Sydney Morning Herald. 12th October 1920, p8 (ex Trove).
[3] Sydney Morning Herald. 28th February 1890, p9 (ex Trove).
[4] Sydney Morning Herald. 12th March 1890, p5 (ex Trove).
[5] Freeman's Journal. 8th February 1890, p16 (ex Trove)
[6] Sydney Morning Herald. 26th April 1892, p3 (ex Trove).
[7] Sydney Morning Herald. 12th October 1920, p8 (ex Trove).
  Queanbeyan Age. 21st October 1899, p2 (ex Trove).
[8] Sydney Morning Herald. 24th July 1902, p4 (ex Trove).
  Bathurst Free Press & Mining Journal. 25th July 1902, p2 (ex Trove)

no doubting the high esteem in which he was held by the members of the Land Court.

Keating was not long at Orange before he was appointed to the position of Chairman for the Tamworth Land Board (1903) followed by his appointment as Chairman of the Wagga Wagga Land Board (1904).[9] Keating held this latter position for some seven years until March 1911 at which time he was appointed Chief Inspector for the Department of Lands.
Keating had planned to take six months leave and travel through England & Europe, but had to forgo his plans as a consequence of the promotion, he being *"required in connection with some special scheme of the department."*[10]

At the end of his time in Wagga Wagga a special banquet was held on the 1st April 1911, at Bellair's Commercial Hotel, to demonstrate the esteem and respect in which Mr Keating was held. The event was described as *"a great gathering of influential men from points covering a large area."* and *"easily the finest gathering of its kind which has taken place in Wagga for many years."*

Guests at the banquet included:
Mr J. J. McGrath (chairman)
Mr R. Donaldson, M.L.A – a long time friend who had travelled from Sydney.
Mr G. P. Wilson, Big Springs (Vice-chairman)
Mr W. A. Robinson, Kimo / Mr C. J. Fraser, Gundagai (and Deltroit) / N. C. Clapperton, Brookong / J. Lynch, Young / S. E. Napier, Lockhart / R. G. Kiddle, Carabost / J. G. MacPherson, Deepwater / H. E. Palmer, Germanton / W. H. Lee, Cootamundra / George Stevenson, P.M. / Dr C. F. Warren / H. Evans, Gundagai / A. E. Westby, Pullitop / H. S. Headley / J. Jeremy / L. A. Fosbery / Alfred mate, Tarcutta / N. V. Devlin / P. J. Coffey / S. Sullivan / E. W. Booty / A. A. Meurant / G. Shephard / P. Hann / J. P. Byrne / J. A. Mullholland / A. C. Chandler & E. H. Hedditch – secretaries.

Mr Keating was presented with a gold watch inscribed with the following words:
"Presented to J. T. Keating, Esq., by a few personal friends. Ist April. 1911."

Mr McGrath noted that they were preparing *"a little souvenir, an album of views of the towns which Mr Keating had visited in his official capacity as Chairman of the Local land Board."* The album was to *"contain facsimiles of the signatures of all those present at the banquet."*

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[9] Sydney Morning Herald. 12th October 1920, p8 (ex Trove).
[10] Sydney Morning Herald. 16th March 1911, p8 (ex Trove).

Mr Donaldson gave a popular speech, which drew loud laughter and many hearty cheers.

It went, in part, as follows:

"*He* [Keating] *would…take up his residence at Manly, and would there take to the fashionable pastime of surf-bathing. He would there gaze on Nature's most beautiful creations and (referring in amusing terms to Mr Keating's celibate condition) would do, as he had helped so many others to do, make his selection. He would however remind him of the clause in the land laws, with which he was so familiar, which referred to survey before selection*"

In response Keating stated "*He had never felt more proud than he did at this gathering…..The faith which it showed they had in him made him have faith in himself. The mementos they were presenting him with he would treasure the whole of his life.*"

In 1912 Keating was appointed Assistant Under-Secretary for Lands, followed by his appointment as Under-Secretary in 1920, in the latter instance succeeding Mr A. J. Hare.[11]

Keating was also a trustee of the Taronga Park Zoo.[12]

On the 21st February 1922, at the age of sixty five, Keating retired, this being in accordance with the rules of the Public Service relating to age.[13]

On the 17th June 1929 John Thomas Keating passed away at the age of seventy two years.[14]

Left: John Thomas Keating, Under Secretary of Lands. c1922. Photo courtesy NSW State Library.

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[11] Sydney Morning Herald. 12th October 1920, p8 (ex Trove).
[12] Sydney Morning Herald. 12th October 1920, p8 (ex Trove).
[13] Sydney Morning Herald. 17th February 1922, p8. (ex Trove).
    Sydney Morning Herald. 22nd June 1929, p19. (ex Trove).
[14] Sydney Morning Herald. 22nd June 1929, p19. (ex Trove).

In July 1994 (65 years after Keating had passed away) the album that was presented to Keating was rescued, by Mrs J. M. Page of Beverly Hills, from a pile of rubbish placed out for collection in Beverly Hills, Sydney. Mrs Page subsequently contacted the Wagga Wagga City Council.

Thanks to the foresight of the Wagga Wagga City Council, the efforts of the Wagga Wagga City Library, and the financial support of the Wagga Wagga Chamber of Commerce (through the Community Advancement Fund), the album has been restored and preserved and is now on display at the City Library.

In the latter part of 2012 the Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society and CSU Regional Archives, in cooperation with the City Library scanned and digitised each and every photo in the album (some seventy in total), with the intent to make them accessible for viewing online.
Higher quality copies are available from the Wagga Wagga City Library, who control the copyright to these photos.

The End.