

Uncovered: Rena Jones' lovely letter to the people

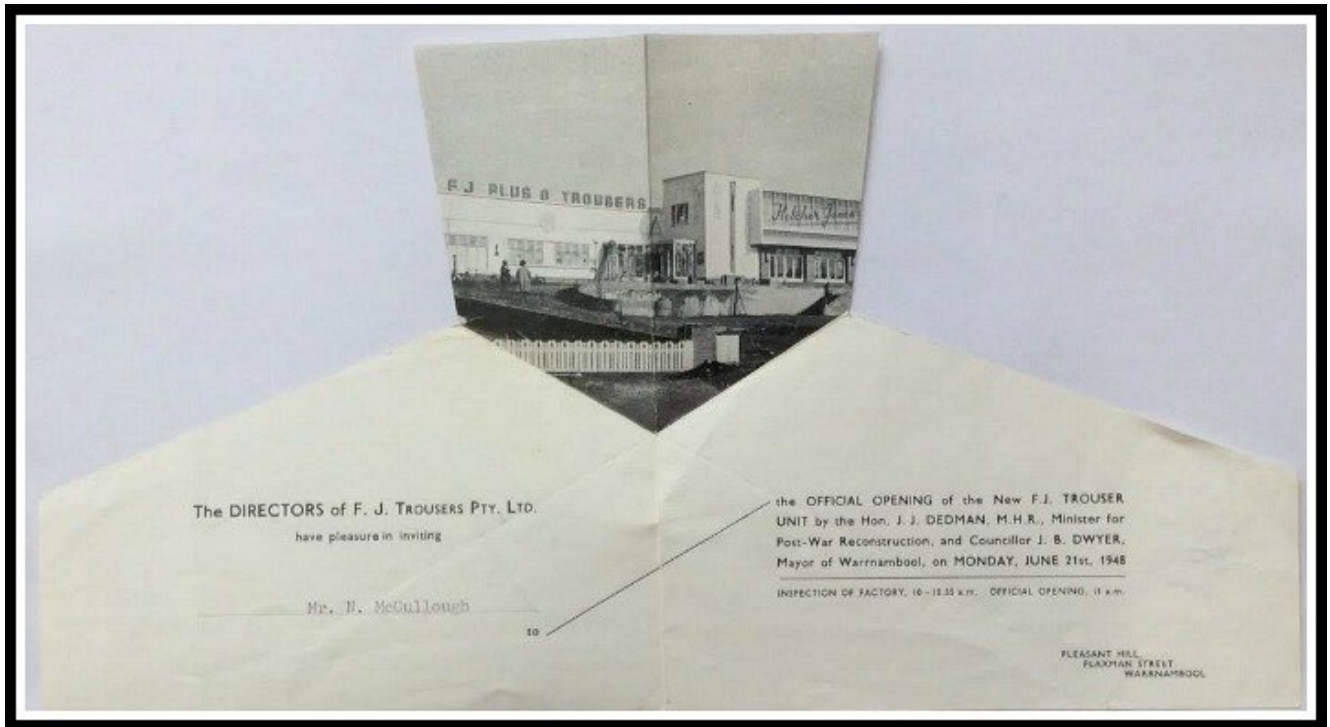


Rena Ellen Jones, wife of the late Sir Fletcher Jones, was a major support to Sir Fletcher as he slowly built his clothing and drapery business from the ground up, including learning how to drive the delivery truck. Image courtesy of [The FJ Foundation](#).

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] A[/dropcap] little hidden gem has emerged from amid the thousands of items donated to the [Melbourne University Archives](#) by the family of the late **Sir Fletcher Jones**.

MUV archivist **Melinda Barrie** went searching among the substantial collection for evidence of the contents of a time capsule that is believed to have been installed in the Fletcher Jones factory at Pleasant Hill, Warrnambool, some time after it was officially opened in 1948.



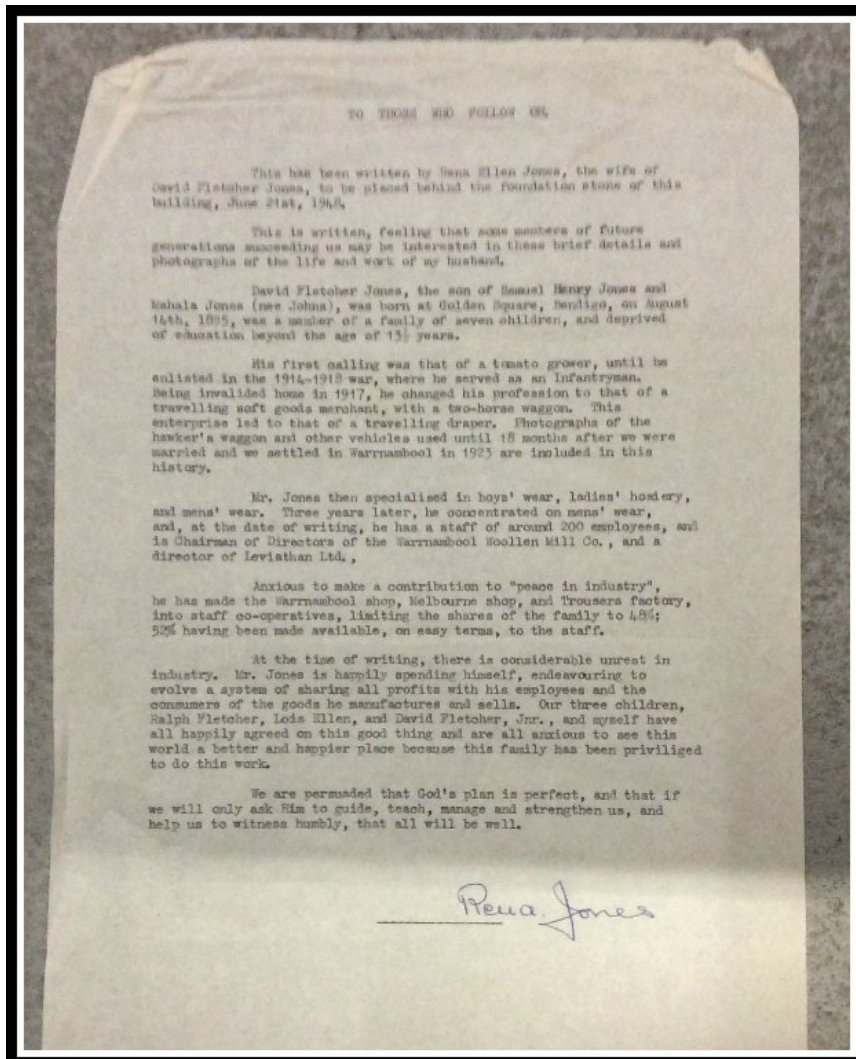
The official invitation to the opening of the FJ Trouser Unit at Pleasant Hill, Flaxman St, Warrnambool on June 21, 1948. Image reference: 2012.0031 Fletcher Jones Collection, Melbourne University Archives.

What Melinda found was a letter from the late **Rena Jones**, wife of Sir Fletcher, that she no doubt drafted and re-drafted and then tapped out on a typewriter, to be placed behind the foundation stone of the Pleasant Hill factory.

The letter, which was possibly accompanied by a series of photographs, was intended to capture a little of the ethics, spirit and philosophy of Sir Fletcher and his family as they slowly built their business from the humblest of beginnings.



What Rena didn't know at that time, of course, was just how successful the Fletcher Jones company would become, how many people it would go on to employ in Warrnambool, Mt Gambier and Melbourne – and how strong the connection remains to Warrnambool through the revival of the Fletcher Jones site and the [ongoing collection of personal stories about the site](#).



The letter penned by the late Rena Jones, wife of Sir Fletcher Jones, and placed behind the foundation stone of the Fletcher Jones factory and gardens when they opened on June 21, 1948. Image courtesy of the Melbourne University Archives.

Here is the letter in full:

To those who follow:

'This has been written by Rena Ellen Jones, the wife of David Fletcher Jones, to be placed behind the foundation stone of this building, June 21st, 1948.

This is written, feeling that some members of future generations succeeding us may be interested in these brief details and photographs of the life and work of my husband.

David Fletcher Jones, the son of Samuel Henry Jones and Mahala Jones (nee Johns), was born at Golden Square, Bendigo, on August 14, 1895, was a member of a family of seven children, and deprived of education beyond the age of 13 1/2 years.

His first calling was that of a tomato grower, until he enlisted in the 1914-18 war, where he served as an Infantryman. Being invalided home in 1917, he changed his profession to that of a soft goods merchant, with a two-horse waggon (sic). This enterprise led to that of a travelling draper. Photographs of the hawker's wagon and other vehicles used until 18 months after we were married and settled in Warrnambool in 1923 are included in this history.

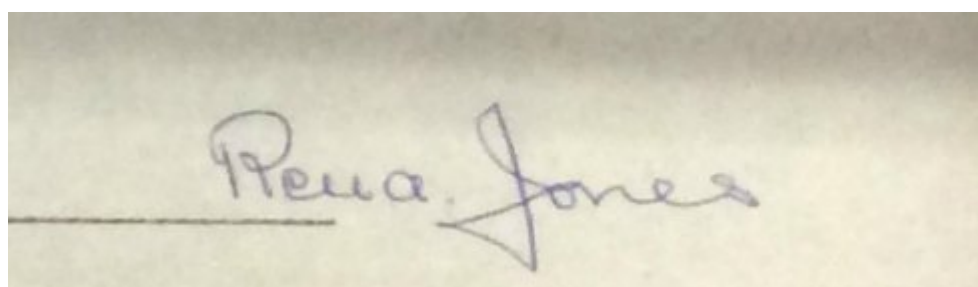
Mr Jones' then specialised in boys' wear, ladies' wear and mens' wear. Three years later, he concentrated on mens' wear and, at the time of writing, he has a staff of around 200 employees, and is Chairman of Directors of the Warrnambool Woollen Mill Co, and a director of Leviathan Ltd.

Anxious to make a contribution to "peace in industry", he has made the Warrnambool shop, Melbourne shop and Trousers factory into staff co-operatives, limiting the shares of the family to 48%; 52% having been made available, on easy terms, to the staff.

At the time of writing, there is considerable unrest in the

industry. Mr Jones is happily spending himself, endeavouring to evolve a system of sharing all profits with his employees and the consumers of the goods he manufactures and sells. Our three children, Ralph Fletcher, Lois Ellen and David Fletcher Jr, and myself have all happily agreed on this thing and are all anxious to see this world a better and happier place because this family has been privileged to do this work.

We are persuaded that God's plan is perfect, and that if we only ask Him to guide, teach, manage and strengthen us, and help us to witness humbly, that all will be well."

A photograph of a handwritten signature in blue ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The signature reads "Paula Jones" in a cursive script. The first name "Paula" is written above a horizontal line, and the last name "Jones" is written below it, with a large, stylized 'J'.

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T[/dropcap]he MUV Fletcher Jones collection includes more than 3000 photographs and artefacts – including many from the Warrnambool factory in the 70s, 80s and 90s – all of which will be cleaned and then 300 selected for digitalisation.

"We are on track to get that project well and truly underway this year, to select and digitise the 300 items that best capture the story of Fletcher Jones," Melinda said.



The late Rena Ellen Jones,
who died in 1970 at the age
of 76. Image courtesy of
the FJ Foundation.



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