Lits Establish Thresher, Move On To Years Of ‘Friendly Rivalry’

By KEN DESSAIN

J. Newton Rayzor, a member of the OWLS Literary Society?

Indeed he was, and that’s only one of the mildly surprising facts which emerge from the depths of past Literary Society History at Rice.

THE OWLS CLUB to which Rayzor belonged, however, was not named after Owen Wister (or Oscar Wilde), but instead was a men’s literary society, formed in 1914 for the purpose of “training in literary expression and public utterance.”

At the same time and for the same purpose, the Riceonian Society for men and the Elizabeth Baldwin Literary Society, for women, were created.

IN 1916, the two men’s associations and the EBLS cooperated on the daring enterprise of publishing a weekly student newspaper, which became known as the Thresher. They remained in competition, nevertheless, for the yearly intersociety forensic festivals. It was at these oratorical contests that the young Mr. Rayzor carried the banner for the OWLS Club.

During World War I, the men’s clubs withered away, leaving only the EB’s. Then, in 1918, six members of this society, in order to foster a “gentle feeling of college spirit and friendly rivalry among the women of the Institute,” withdrew and organized the Pallas Athene Literary Society.

THESE TWO societies, still dedicated to “literary expression and public utterance,” held regular meetings at which members of the clubs as well as noted speakers gave book reviews and talks on literary subjects. They mapped out yearly programs of study, as in 1919 when they chose to focus upon contemporary poets Rudyard Kipling, Allen Seeger, and Joyce Kilmer.

The literary societies were further expanded in 1924 with the formation of the Owen Wister Literary Society. The OWLS, like the two established clubs, was bound by a “common interest in good literature.” The following year all three societies started to rest.