

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News. May 14, 2018

**Lela Hall (1907-1985):** In the world of trapshooting in the late 1930s, there was no question that Lela Hall of Strasburg, Missouri, was the top female shooter in the country. Compared to more modern women, she was certainly not a reliable champion, but in the trapshooting world where she competed, none were comparable.

Lela came to the attention of those who attended the Grand American Tournament in Ohio about 1934, when she scored high in the Grand American Handicap (GAH). Larry Dana of Derrick City, Pennsylvania, won the Grand American Handicap (the World Series of Trapshooting) that year after breaking 98 out of 100 and a shoot-off with one other. Following these two 98s were about eight 97s, and Lela was one of them. After several shoot-offs, she beat out all her competitors and claimed third prize in the GAH. She continued to win national, state and regional women's championships all over the Midwest in the next few years.

Arthur Cuscaden of the Hercules Powder Company had developed what soon became the "World Championship Squad," which broke the old 5-man squad record at Yorklyn in 1935 (498 x 500), and then broke its own record in 1936 with 499. This squad consisted of Cuscaden himself, Ned Lilly, Hale Jones, Joe Hiestand, and Bill Eldred. When Eldred dropped out in 1937, Lela Hall was invited to take his place. While her scores did not usually match those of her masculine squad members, she was a real asset to the squad and to the Hercules Sporting Powder Division that sponsored it. This group of five experts shot together at the Grand American Tournament until Lela dropped out about 1941, due in part to ill health.

The program at the "Grand" varied slightly from year to year, but in 1938, the regular 16-yard program totaled 1,000 targets, if a shooter entered everything over a six-day period. On a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday toward the end of August, the "Preliminary Days" consisted of 100 targets each on Friday and Saturday, and 200 on Sunday, which was called the Vandalia Open Championship, the only event during the week where Industry Representatives could compete with the Amateurs. Then during championship week were 200-target events on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, respectively. The championship squad did not shoot on Friday, but shot together from Saturday on, 900 targets in all. Lela, not a large woman, had endurance enough to stay with her men in the old "championship squad." The squad was a huge attraction on the shooting grounds, and a large gallery watched them shoot twice each day (it was usual to shoot 100 at a time, then rest two or three hours, and then shoot the second 100).

The gallery grew in 1938 as Joe Hiestand, shooting just ahead of Lela, broke 100 straight on Saturday, 200 straight on Sunday, and 200 straight on Monday. Fred Tomlin, a Remington Industry Representative, had posted a new official long run record on Monday with 714 straight (started in June or July, and continued at Yorklyn in early August). Hiestand had a carry-over of 66 straight from Yorklyn, so at the end of Monday's shooting, he had a run of 566 unfinished.

Hiestand went on to break 200 on Tuesday and 200 on Wednesday, and while almost everyone on the grounds watched, Lela Hall was shooting right next to him. Leaving the Grand American with a run of 966 unfinished, Hiestand finally finished his official run at Carmel, Indiana about a month later after he had broken 1,179 straight!

Lela Hall shot a pump gun, probably a Winchester Model 12, and her shooting form was somewhat awkward. She held her gun low and toward the center of her chest, with her head bent forward to align her sights, but her timing was perfect. She continued her winning ways until the early 1940s, but she had health issues, and her marriage fell apart. She came to Yorklyn in 1942 as a guest of J. R. Johnston Jr. of Hartford City, Indiana, but her health was not good, and she did not shoot very well. She married Dave Frank before the end of World War II, her health improved, and she enjoyed several more years of shooting, but she was not on the pinnacle of her earlier shooting career. Many women "came on strong," and by the 1960s, a few were good enough to achieve

the 27-yard line (the maximum distance from the trap) in handicap shooting. In Lela's time, the maximum distance was 25 yards, and she usually shot from 22.