

Jury acquits Briard on sex charges

Vicki Gerdes, DL-Online

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FOLEY — Frazee hog farmer Robert Briard was found innocent of second degree criminal sexual conduct today in Benton County District Court.

A 12-person jury deliberated for roughly an hour following the conclusion of closing statements early this afternoon.

"Justice was done for the second time," said Briard's attorney, Earl Grey, as he left the courthouse.

After the prosecution rested its case this morning, Grey called four witnesses in quick succession — all of them teenage relatives of Briard, and cousins of the victim.



A key element in the defense's case was the fact that the cousin whom the victim claimed she had told about the summer 2005 incident shortly after it occurred failed to corroborate her story.

The girl, now a 14-year-old student at Battle Lake High School, said that she never discussed the alleged incident with the victim, whom she admitted that, at one time, had been a close friend.

She and two of the other four witnesses were girls, who all said they had been on rides with their grandpa on the 4-wheeler. They also each said that they had ridden in front of their grandfather on the vehicle, with him holding them tight — in a similar fashion to an incident described by the victim as having made her feel "uncomfortable."

Also casting doubt upon the victim's testimony was her 14-year-old male cousin, who had injured his nose on the day of the alleged incident four years ago.

During his testimony, the young man said emphatically that the victim had been wearing her swimsuit that day — not the jeans that she had described.

In her testimony, the victim said Briard had run his hand up the seam of her jeans as she was sitting "Indian style" on the dock next to him. He had, she testified, kept moving his hand closer and closer to, and eventually over, her "bottom" — a term which she indicated she used to refer to her vagina.

But her cousin, who was badly injured that day and was rushed to the hospital for stitches to close the wound on his nose, said he didn't recall her having worn anything other than her swimsuit that day.

Also, he said that he didn't remember having seen her and her grandfather leave the lake cabin together and head down towards the dock.

In his closing arguments, Becker County Attorney Mike Fritz asked simply, "What possible motive would she have (for lying)? Does it appear she was having fun? That she was being rewarded?"

"Children lie to get out of trouble, not get into it."

But Grey said the inconsistencies in both the victim's testimony, and her mother's, were "key inconsistencies — not trivial."

He further noted that there was no believable evidence that Briard had touched the victim inappropriately.

"We have proved beyond a reasonable doubt that it just didn't happen," Grey said.

The jury was apparently in agreement with that statement, as the jurors took very little time to reach agreement on their "not guilty" verdict.

Briard was also acquitted by a Becker County jury on Dec. 17, 2008 on first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct charges involving a girl under the age of 13. Those incidents allegedly occurred in the 1980s.

His wife Virginia Briard faces six felony counts of contempt of court for allegedly disobeying a subpoena to testify in the 2008 proceedings. Her trial date has not yet been set.

AGWEEK

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Charges dropped against hog farmer

DETROIT LAKES, Minn. — The final three charges have been dropped against well-known Frazee, Minn., hog farmer Robert William Briard.

By: **Nathan Bowe**, INFORUM

DETROIT LAKES, Minn. — The final three charges have been dropped against well-known Frazee, Minn., hog farmer Robert William Briard.

He was facing three gross misdemeanor counts of fifth-degree criminal sexual conduct for alleged nonconsensual sexual contact with a woman over a four- to five-year period in various places in Becker County, according to court records.

Briard, 62, was acquitted by a Becker County jury on Dec. 17, 2008 on first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct charges involving a girl under the age of 13. Those incidents allegedly occurred during the 1980s.

On June 18 a jury found him innocent of second-degree criminal sexual conduct for an incident involving a girl under the age of 13 that allegedly occurred in summer 2005.

The remaining three gross misdemeanor charges were dismissed by the Becker County Attorney's office Friday.

"The victim had had enough," said County Attorney Mike Fritz. "It was law enforcement and the victim not wanting to go through all that again."

The county felt it tried its strongest case first, and had planned to use a conviction in that case to aid with prosecution of the remaining cases.

Briard's attorney, Earl Gray, said the county was right to drop the remaining charges.

"I believe it was the right decision," he said. "The family has gone through a lot over the past couple years — one day it will be over and they'll be back to living normally."

Briard's wife, Virginia, still faces criminal charges in connection with his first case.

She has been charged with six felony counts of contempt of court.

She is accused of going on the run to avoid testifying against her husband, and was charged with one count for each day in December she failed to appear at the first criminal sexual conduct trial of Robert Briard.

Her trial has been set for Sept. 22 in Becker County District Court.

The Detroit Lakes (Minn.) Tribune and The Forum are both owned by Forum Communications Co.

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Sex Charges Against Man Go Back 19 Years

Detroit Lakes, Minn. (AP) — A prominent local businessman and farmer in Becker County has been charged with six counts of criminal sexual conduct.

Robert Briard of rural Frazee, Minn., is accused of molesting girls between 1983 to 2002. The charges include girls as young as 8 years old.

The 60-year-old Briard was arraigned Tuesday in Becker County District Court. Bail was set at \$250,000.

His next court hearing will be held March 5.

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