

Man acquitted in child rape case

BERWICK, Pa. (AP) — A Columbia County Court jury has cleared a Berwick man of charges he had sex with a 5-year-old girl.

After five hours of deliberation, the jury of eight men and four women found defendeant Joseph Blair Jr. innocent Saturday.

“It was the longest five hours of my life,” said Blair, 21, after collapsing in tears on the defense table when the verdict was read.

Blair faced charges of statutory rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse and corruption of a minor.

The girl, now 7, testified during the three-day trial she had been raped “about 100 times” in 1984 in an upstairs bedroom of the Blair’s summer cottage in Orangeville. She said she was threatened with death if she told anyone about the rapes.

Buehner called the girl's testimony fantasy, and defense witnesses testified that the cottage, which has no bedroom doors, was too small for sexual activity to take place without being heard.

No medical or other physical evidence to prove or disprove the charges was available because the girl's mother waited 18 months before going to authorities with the allegations.

The girl and her mother had moved into the cottage in April 1984.

"This verdict was the only fair one they could have reached," said Robert Buehner, Blair's attorney. "I was completely convinced of my clients' innocence all along."