

Victim's family shocked by acquittal in murder trial

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

COLUMBIA, MO. • A jury on Friday acquitted a 46-year-old Ferguson man accused of killing a teenager in Lincoln County 17 years ago.

Michael Dowell was charged with first-degree murder in December 2006 after a DNA sample he submitted to his probation officer in an unrelated case matched a profile created six

years earlier from the underwear of Stephanie Hogland.

The case was moved to Columbia because of publicity in the St. Louis area. Dowell still faces a forcible rape charge in the case. He will remain in the Lincoln County Jail until a future trial, which has not been scheduled.

When Dowell heard the verdict he started crying and held his head in his hands.

Lincoln County Prosecutor

John Richards, who had been seeking the death penalty in the case, could not be reached for comment.

In his opening statements Tuesday, Richards said Dowell lied to investigators about having never met the victim after DNA evidence led them to him 15 years after the young woman's death. Richards told jurors multiple times that the case against Dowell is circumstantial, but he highlighted the defendant's statements to detectives in December 2006.

Dowell's public defender, Tom Marshall, said DNA from the vic-



Dowell

tim could have come from a specimen that was left days before her death — perhaps from consensual sex.

Gayle Hogland of Springfield, Mo., the victim's mother and a retired nurse, said after the verdict that the forensic evidence in the

case had proved Dowell's guilt.

"Apparently the people on the jury are ignorant of medical facts," she said.

Stephanie Hogland's grandmother, Melba Hogland of Linn Creek, Mo., said family members were shocked.

"We're just stunned," she said.

Hogland was 18 when she was beaten to death in 1991, when the family lived in Wentzville.

Hogland, a 1990 graduate of Fort Zumwalt North High School, was last seen early Jan. 6, 1991, after attending a wedding reception with friends in Old Monroe. On the way home, she got a flat tire and pulled into a driveway along Highway W.

Investigators had alleged that Dowell, who lived in the area at the time, stopped on the premise of helping her but instead attacked her. A highway worker discovered Hogland's body more than a day later in a roadside ditch about 15 miles from her car.