

or five miles west of the wreck, a portion of a human skeleton, which was found the day before, probably from the Elizabeth, but I have not knowledge enough of anatomy to decide *confidently*, as many might, whether it was that of a male or a female.<sup>1</sup> I therefore hired Selah Strong, Keeper of the Light,<sup>2</sup> to bury it simply for the present, and mark the spot, leaving it to future events, or a trustworthy examination, to decide the question.

Yrs in haste

Henry D. Thoreau

P.S. No *more* bodies had then been found.

*Correspondent:* Charles Sumner (1811-1874), a Boston lawyer, was known for his opposition to the Mexican War. In 1851 he was elected senator from Massachusetts and became the leading abolitionist in Congress.

<sup>1</sup> Apparently Sumner left the scene of the wreck before the last body was found.

<sup>2</sup> Selah Strong (1816?-1874), son of Silas and Abigail Scudder Strong, married Susan E. Vail (1817?-1897), daughter of Platt and Hannah Smith Vail, in 1837. They lived in Islip. Strong was keeper of the Fire Island lighthouse.

*Copy-text:* ALS (MH-H, MS Am 1 [6271])

*Published:* *Cor* 1958, 263

*From Charles Sumner*

*July 31, 1850*

Boston July 31<sup>st</sup> '50

My dear Sir,

I desire to thank you for yr kindness in writing me with regard to the remains of a human body found on the beach last Saturday.

From what you wrote & from what I hear from others, it seems impossible to identify them.

If the body of my brother could be found,<sup>1</sup> it would be a

great satisfaction to us to bury him with those of his family who have gone before him.

Believe me, dear Sir, faithfully & gratefully

Yours,  
Charles Sumner

Henry D. Thoreau<sup>e</sup>

*Correspondent:* See p. 76.

<sup>1</sup> Horace Sumner's remains were never found.

*Copy-text:* ALS (VtMiM, aberms.sumernc.1850.07.31)

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*Editor's Note*

Henry D. Thoreau] *written at bottom of p. 1 of MS*

*To Harrison Gray Otis Blake*

*August 9, 1850*

Concord Aug. 9<sup>th</sup> 1850

Mr Blake,

I received your letter just as I was rushing to Fire Island Beach to recover what remained of Margaret Fuller--and read it on the way. That event and its train, as much as anything, have prevented my answering it before-- It is wisest to speak when you are spoken to.<sup>1</sup> I will now endeavor to reply at the risk of having nothing to say.

I find that actual events, notwithstanding the singular prominence which we all allow them, are far less real than the creations of my imagination. They are truly visionary and insignificant--all that we commonly call life & death--and affect me less than my dreams. This petty stream which from time to time swells & carries away the mills and bridges of our habitual life--and that mightier stream or ocean on which we securely float--what makes the difference between them? I have in my pocket a button which I ripped off the coat of the Marquis<sup>a</sup> of Ossoli