

Merton's Constant Friend at Saint Bonaventure: Irenaeus Herscher, OFM

By **Kathleen Cecala**

Of all the titles one might assign to Thomas Merton – monk, writer, spiritual master – one that might be overlooked most frequently is simply *friend*. Merton was fortunate to have had many good friends who played various roles in his life: comrades, companions, mentors, confidants, consolers, all vital connections for a man who chooses solitude as a spiritual path. During a crucial point in his life, a period of intense spiritual seeking that occurred just before his entry into the Trappist monastery at Gethsemani, he was fortunate to become friends with a Franciscan friar and librarian, who shared with him a strong spiritual bent and a love of books. This was Father Irenaeus Herscher, OFM, whom Merton mentions with bemused affection in *The Seven Storey Mountain*:

The librarian was Father Irenaeus, who looked up at us through his glasses and recognized Lax with ingenuous surprise. He always seemed to be surprised and glad to see everybody. Lax introduced us to him. “This is Ed Rice, this is Tom Merton.”

“Ah! Mr. Rice . . . Mr. Myrtle.” Father Irenaeus took us both in, with the eyes of a rather bookish child, and shook hands without embarrassment.

“Merton,” said Lax. “Tom Merton.”

“Yes, glad to know you, Mr. Myrtle,” said Father Irenaeus.¹

Merton goes on to assess Father Irenaeus as a “happy little Franciscan,” suggesting he was a good archetype for Franciscans in general with his casual generosity and lack of rigidity, though he notes with approval: “on the whole, the little library at St. Bonaventure’s was always one of the most orderly and peaceful I have ever seen” (*SSM* 240).

Merton first became acquainted with Irenaeus through his Columbia University classmate and perhaps closest friend, the poet Robert Lax. In his biography of Merton, Michael Mott writes: “Lax made friends with the Franciscan friars [at Saint Bonaventure]. His particular friend there was Father Irenaeus Herscher, the librarian.”² Michael N. McGregor also mentions in his recent biography of Lax the poet’s closeness to Father Irenaeus, noting the librarian would let him and Merton “check out whatever they wanted for as long as they wanted to keep it.”³ Lax had lived in nearby Olean as a boy and still had family there, as well as access to a cottage in the wooded hills above the city.

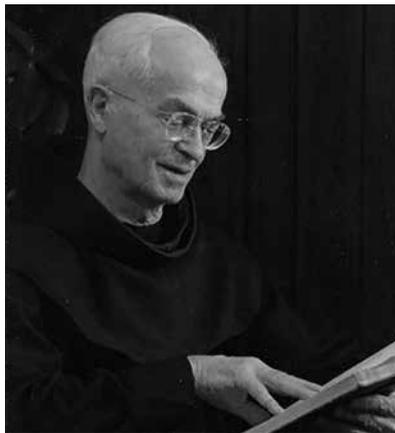
From here, Merton would amble down the mountain along Two Mile Road to the little college nestled in the Allegheny River valley, for essential reading material from the campus library, which Father Irenaeus was happy to give him the run of.



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Father Irenaeus would remain Merton's link to St. Bonaventure long after Merton became Father Louis of Gethsemani, and the two exchanged letters⁴ – with Father Irenaeus travelling to Kentucky at least once to visit him⁵ – until Merton's death in 1968. After that, Irenaeus worked to keep Merton's memory and flame alive, saving various pieces and portions of precious writing Merton himself entrusted to him, writing which became the nucleus of the Merton Archives at Saint Bonaventure University. He also became close to many of Merton's companions, notably Merton's literary agent, Naomi Burton Stone, who once affectionately referred to him as the "Franciscan sparrow."⁶ Having known Father Irenaeus myself, I think this is the most apt description of him: he was a bit birdlike, with bright dark eyes, flitting about the library in his brown robes, rosary beads clicking against his legs, full of an exuberant kind of energy.



I was fortunate to have worked with Father Irenaeus when I was a student at Saint Bonaventure; it was through him I gained my acquaintance with Merton and his books. He is my one degree of separation, as the old trope goes. And though this article started as a brief, sentimental kind of reminiscence, my own research into Father's life revealed a number of other things: not only the strength and affection of his long friendship with Tom Merton, but a kind of American success story, the story of a long, distinguished and unlikely academic career, filled with fervent devotion to the Franciscan order and its ideals. It was a story pieced together over the course of a summer – starting with my own long-dormant, dusty memories of my college days, the vague memory of Merton letters and manuscripts Father Irenaeus had shown and shared with me, aided by several journeys to western New York and hours spent poring over both Merton's manuscripts and Irenaeus' own personal effects and writings: photo albums, birthday cards, newspaper clippings, obituaries, published articles and the best prize of all, about 20 pages of a fragmentary autobiography Father had started – typing carefully on lined scholastic paper – which nevertheless crystallized some of the most important events of his life, including his immigrant's journey to America, and also, the road that led him to the Franciscans.

Merton and Irenaeus share something in common with each other in their origins. Both were immigrants to the United States, though Irenaeus in a much more classic sense than Merton – though, ironically, it was Merton who came through Ellis Island; Irenaeus' family docked in Philadelphia.⁷ Both were born in France, so to speak: Merton was born in Prades, in the south, in 1915, while Irenaeus was born in 1903 in an Alsace-Lorraine village called Guebwillier, which at the time of Irenaeus' birth was part of Germany, but is now part of France. Both came to the US as children – Merton, first with his parents as a one-year-old in 1916 (see *SSM* 6), and permanently as an orphaned nineteen-year-old in late 1934 (see *SSM* 128), while Irenaeus, as an eleven-year-old named Josef, travelled with his large family in steerage aboard the ship *The Breslau*, out of Bremerhaven, Germany.

In his fragmentary autobiography, Father Irenaeus describes the long journey, undertaken just a year before the outbreak of World War I: leaving the family domicile for good, following an invitation from his mother's brother, already in America, all their belongings packed into a crate 9-by-9-feet square, young Josef seated on the horse-drawn cart with a household package he was

responsible for, and gaping out the windows as the horse trundled out of Guebwillier; then the train that would take them to Germany's North Sea coast and the ship at Bremerhaven. "My lucky number," he declares, "is thirteen! For we arrived on Friday, June 13th 1913, after thirteen days at sea, at Pier 13 in Philadelphia."⁸

But there was a profound difference in Irenaeus' and his friend Merton's social standing and family situation, which nevertheless might have pushed them, subconsciously, toward each other. Merton was something of an orphan, losing his mother at an early age, then his father when he was almost sixteen, living with relatives in the UK and the US, while being provided for financially, well enough to be educated at outstanding institutions: Oakham, then Cambridge, then Columbia University in New York. He had a brother, John Paul, who would die in World War II. Irenaeus came from a large, intact family of six children, the son of a laborer and a housewife. He was the only boy among five sisters, which surely must account, in some way, for the more endearing aspects of his personality: utter patience, sentimentality, exuberant generosity and even indulgence with those he loved, much of that rooted in his complete desire to please. But perhaps he longed for a brother, and Merton, who for extended periods saw little of the one he had, might have been naturally drawn to him.

The Herscher family settled in the sprawling industrial city of Camden, New Jersey in 1913, and the 1915 New Jersey state census has them living in the city's third ward, at 312 Clinton Street, just two blocks from the waterfront. The house still stands – though just barely. It is a sliver of a row house, jammed in with all the rest, in a deeply troubled neighborhood pockmarked with empty fields and piles of trash. But it had never been a fashionable or upscale neighborhood. The Herschers' neighbors were all immigrants as well, from a veritable United Nations of countries. His father, Jean-Baptiste Herscher, who Irenaeus tells us was musically inclined and taught his son how to play the violin, took a job with the Campbell Soup Company; and Irenaeus describes how the family ate at a different variety of soup every night, depending on which dented cans Papa brought home from work.

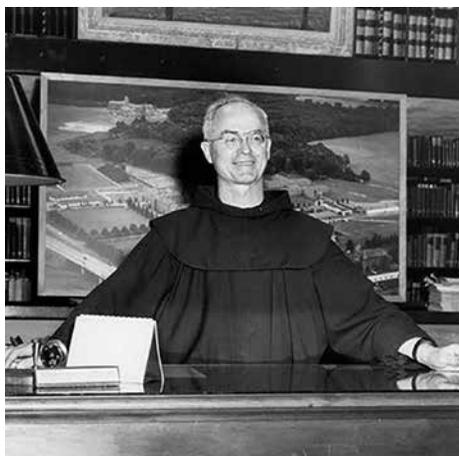
Here young Josef – now Joseph – started education at a local parochial school, as he recounts in his autobiography. He then entered Camden High School, and took various part-time jobs, including a stint at a soda fountain. But after his sophomore year, he left school to help with the family finances and begin working at the New York Shipbuilding Company – located, perversely, not in New York City, but in Camden, at the site where the current Walt Whitman Bridge to Philadelphia begins. Originally meant to be built in Staten Island, the shipyard located to Camden upon acquiring a better deal on waterfront property, but its name had already been legally incorporated. It was, in its day, the largest shipyard in the world, with over 30,000 employees. This was the firm responsible for the construction of the *Saratoga* and any number of warships and US ocean liners; Joseph Herscher had various menial tasks ranging from template checker to clerical work in accounting.

A high-school dropout working in a shipyard – this doesn't seem like an auspicious start for a scholarly priest-librarian. But his working-class background no doubt contributed to his down-to-earth manner and honed the strong work ethic he carried with him all his life. The Federal Census of 1920 notes the presence of a seventeen-year-old wage-earner named Joseph Herscher, living under his father's roof at 312 Clinton; his occupation was listed as "operator" at an unnamed shipyard. And yet, it was that very year – 1920 – when his life took a dramatic turn.

It was on the Camden waterfront that his calling came gradually and gently, as he tells us in his autobiography, for he had fallen into the habit of stopping by Sacred Heart Church on Ferry Street

for daily morning Mass, which was literally on his way to work; his family lived just north of the shipyard. Here he often assisted the priests as well, and when a young man from the neighborhood entered the Franciscan order and became Father Cuthbert Cotton, Joseph served his first Mass, and then right afterward, went directly to the sacristy to ask the brand new priest about becoming a Franciscan himself. But Joseph did not want to be a priest, merely a brother: he worried that his lack of formal education would be a major roadblock. “I was anxious only to be helpful to others, to serve, either as a nursing brother or any assignments that might be given to me” (Herscher, “Autobiography”). Father Cotton connected young Joseph with his own Franciscan superiors, and thus began both his spiritual and intellectual path: entering the Franciscans’ now defunct St. Joseph Seminary in Callicoon, NY in 1920, he finally earned his high-school diploma, and began serious studies for the priesthood. He was sent to the Franciscans’ novitiate house at Paterson, NJ in 1924, and finally ordained in 1931, given the name of a second-century Doctor of the Church, Irenaeus, meaning “peaceful.” He received his first degree, a bachelor’s, at Saint Bonaventure College, the place that would eventually become his life’s work and his home.

The Franciscans had ambitious plans for him: he was sent, coincidentally, to Columbia University in New York City – which of course Merton also attended. They missed each other by just a year – though with Merton a lively, carousing undergraduate in English, and Irenaeus a serious young priest studying for his masters’ degree in library science, their paths were hardly likely to cross. Irenaeus received his master’s degree in 1933, while Merton was at Columbia from 1934 to 1938. Armed with his brand-new degree, Irenaeus returned to the “Enchanted Mountains” of southwestern New York and took up a position as assistant librarian at Saint Bonaventure. At the time, there was no Friedsam Memorial Library; the college library was located inside Alumni Hall, a building that no longer stands (if it did, it would be behind the current De La Roche Hall). It turned out to be an extraordinary bit of timing, for several reasons: one, the college had received an exceptional gift from estate trustees of a mysterious New York retail magnate – a man who was not even Catholic nor had he any connection whatsoever to Saint Bonaventure College. This was Col. Michael Friedsam, an art collector and philanthropist whose fortune was tied to the B. Altman & Co. department-store chain. The money he left behind when he died was to be spent “for the care and education of the young, and the care and comfort of the aged,” but one of the stipulations was that any institution aided had to be in New York State.⁹ It was college president Father Thomas Plassmann and the university’s librarian at the time, Father Albert O’Brien, who had the idea to approach the trustees of the Friedsam Foundation, who went on to approve \$125,000 for the construction of a new library at the college. This largesse helped fund a beautiful jewelbox of Florentine architecture, designed to house the university’s collection of books and art. Father O’Brien oversaw the design of the library and was present at its groundbreaking ceremony. But within months, he was dead – a sudden, accidental death according to several reports – and it was his young assistant, Father Irenaeus,



who took over the reins of the library, supervised its building and set up the plan of the original library which still stands today.

It was at this time that Thomas Merton entered his life. He had initially come to Olean in the late 1930s as a visitor, a guest of his friend Lax, and the very first time he visited the campus of St. Bonaventure College, he refused to even get out of the car, feeling spooked by what he saw as the campus' overwhelming religious atmosphere (see *SSM* 200-201). But in time, encouraged by the ever-friendly and gracious Father Irenaeus, he was making frequent visits to the library for reading material during his holidays at the Lax cottage. Irenaeus, in a published reminiscence, describes his first impression of Merton as follows: "He was slimly built, of medium height, and his blond hair was combed straight back. His cheekbones were quite prominent, making his eyes seem dark and somber. At first glance you would never mistake him for an intellectual . . . Outwardly, he was as simple and unaffected as a child, and he always spoke quietly and with humility, as if deliberately holding his knowledge in reserve."¹⁰

Eventually Merton was hired by Father Plassmann as an English instructor. His time at St. Bonaventure did not last very long: it was while at Bona's that he visited Gethsemani Abbey for the first time, and came away deeply impressed. It was also at Saint Bonaventure that Merton began to write, in a fervent and serious way. He started at least two novels, and kept several versions of a journal which revealed thoughts, hopes, ambitions and the state of his mind at various times of the year. Father Irenaeus had a particular and important influence on his spiritual life at this time. Merton himself tells us that it was Irenaeus who showed him how to understand the priestly breviaries he has already begun to read as a layman: "Father Irenaeus helped to straighten me out, and told me how the various feasts worked together, and how to say first Vespers for the proper feast, and all the other things one needs to find out" (*SSM* 303); and also, that it was Irenaeus who introduced "Tom" to the spirituality of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower: "There is a shrine dedicated to her on our campus and it was there, one November night, that Merton prayed about becoming a monk" (Herscher, "Therese" 35). This is indeed a moment Merton describes with great emotion in *Seven Storey Mountain* (see *SSM* 364-65); the shrine still exists, though finding it might take some hunting around – it is located toward the western back edge of the campus, next to Plassman Hall on the way to the parking lots.¹¹

When Merton left St. Bonaventure for good – for he went right from Olean to Kentucky, by train, back in the days when you could do that sort of thing – he left behind a scattered paper trail, giving away some of his writings to students and a seminarian he'd known briefly, but many pages were left with Father Irenaeus, who obviously had some premonition about his friend Tom's future fame. He kept them carefully in his office, along with letters he received now from Merton the Trappist monk, and in time, this collection grew as Merton's fame did, beginning with the best-selling autobiography and continuing with the huge output of books, articles and writing Merton produced in the last 27 years of his life. Father Irenaeus became Merton's unofficial curator, and eventually others sent their own contributions to his stash: Bob Lax, Ed Rice and other friends, Merton's agent Naomi Burton Stone, and his esteemed English professor at Columbia, Mark Van Doren. Even Merton himself was aware of Irenaeus' role in preserving his legacy, and in one letter to him asks for a favor involving the journals he'd kept at Saint Bonaventure, a startling request to delete several lines in one of the original journals:

Obviously, things written so long ago, and when I had so little wisdom, often call out for a change here and there. . . . The passage concerns an important personage, now a Catholic. I would like you to render illegible part of the third line and the whole fourth line. . . . And also most especially the last three words of the 8th line of this paragraph. . . . I hope you don't mind my asking you this, and hope also that my request is intelligible in the terms in which I have put it. (*RJ* 296)

In case you are wondering whether Father Irenaeus followed these instructions, I can assure you he did. I studied the original journal at the SBU Merton Archives, and spent quite a few minutes trying to read underneath the firm inking out, but to no avail. Knowing Father Irenaeus as a man who took his profession as librarian quite seriously, I think it must have pained him to desecrate an original manuscript in such a way! But friendship won out over propriety, and we might never know what inflammatory words lie under those cross-outs.

Father Irenaeus' own archives, though a bit jumbled, nevertheless reveal the exceptional figure in library science that he became. He wrote: "The library stands midway between the past and the future. It provides us with research: the crystallized heritage and wisdom of the ages. Progress requires research. If we wish to go ahead, we must first go back and learn from the experiences of the past."¹² I have no doubt he would have embraced the Internet, although he might lament the lack of personal communication it would foster. He had several quirky passions, such as philately and the local oil industry, which he wrote about for several industry magazines. And he was an enthusiastic letter-writer, not only to friends and family and acquaintances, but to various national publications.

A deeply sentimental man, he was easily moved and touched, evidenced by several instances. There is the matter of a certain spot on a hillside, just south of the St. Bonaventure campus, a bald spot on a hill amid the trees that was still fairly barren when I was a student (I hiked up there once with a friend), but is now rapidly filling in. This is a story that came to me from Paul Spaeth, the current library director at St. Bonaventure. The spot came to be known as "Merton's Heart," a name given to it by Father Irenaeus, who recalled it as being a place special to Merton in a spiritual way, although in truth Merton is not known to have frequented that particular spot, although he did spend lots of time hiking up and down Two Mile Road nearby. But it does seem very much like Father Irenaeus to want some visible reminder of the old friend he had loved so much.

Another anecdote concerns an anonymously circulated prayer which started popping up in newspapers across the country in the early 1950s. Titled "A Bride's Prayer," it was a rather syrupy ode by a young woman about to marry and her fears about married life: "I pray Thee that the beautiful joy of this morning may never grow dim with tears of regret." *The Chicago Tribune*, on receiving this prayer, did some investigating, and found it was being sent around by a certain Father Irenaeus Herscher, of Saint Bonaventure College. And Father Irenaeus revealed to a reporter the source of the prayer: he hadn't written it, but the bride of a friend of his had. This friend came to Father Irenaeus for consolation after his bride died only fourteen months after the wedding. He showed the prayer to Irenaeus, who decided it needed to be shared with the world.¹³ But one of my favorite quotations about Father Irenaeus comes from *Sports Illustrated* magazine, from a March Madness issue in 1961, in an article entitled "Saint Bonaventure Is Second Best": "In the neighboring building, meanwhile, the Reverend Irenaeus Herscher was showing around the oldest Bible in America as casually as if it were a Book-of-the-Month Club selection."¹⁴

Merton's accidental death in 1968 must have come as a tremendous blow to Father Irenaeus. But he spent the years following carefully accumulating and cataloging the items left to him, and remembering him fondly to anyone who would listen. Only six years later, in 1974, he must have still been struggling with his loss. That is when I enter this story, for Father Irenaeus played a role in my life, too. I entered St. Bonaventure as a freshman in 1974, and in my first week, was assigned a job behind the circulation desk at Friedsam Library as part of a work-study program. I would work there all four of my undergraduate years, and came to know Father Irenaeus rather well. And without any effort at impartiality, I will say that I utterly adored him: he was a kind of second eccentric uncle at St. Bona's (the first being an actual uncle of mine, a Franciscan who taught at Christ the King Seminary before it became Francis Hall); indeed, he must have been the one of the most generous, outgoing friars of all time.

Just to see him, with his distinctive bobbling walk, his look of wide-eyed enthusiasm and hopefulness, was a little jolt of sunshine in the midst of the perpetual gray winters of western New York. The staircase that led to his downstairs office is a spiraling iron wentletrap with awkwardly shaped treads, and he had a worrying habit of literally running up and down these steps like an eager fourth-grader – his sandals slapping against the treads, the long rosary at his waist rattling against his legs. Even at his advanced age, he was a slender, spritely man, balding but with slightly ruffled, pure-white hair, and his eyes – indeed the “eyes of a bookish child” as Merton described them – were bright behind rimless spectacles. He spoke with the softest of Old World accents – perhaps a bit more on the German side than the French – in a gentle, slightly raspy high-pitched tenor, his conversation or instructions always punctuated with a quick, almost apologetic – and sometimes conspiratorial – smile, his eyes fastened relentlessly on your face.



Often, when I finished my shift, I walked down the spiral stairs and entered his office. It was a fascinating place, stuffed with books and art and pictures and paper. He had me sit on a stool in the middle, and then stood before me, almost humbly, his hands joined together. “What can I tell you about?” he would always ask, in a hopeful way. And that seemed the essence of him: always willing to serve, to offer, to help, to share – a splendid Franciscan. One day I made a request. I had just finished reading *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and I remembered that Father Irenaeus had been mentioned in it. “Do you have anything from Thomas Merton? A letter . . . some of his writing?” At this, he broke into a huge grin: “Ah, Tom! My friend . . . my good friend Tom!” He actually clapped his hands, then held one finger up, to let me know he had thought of something. He went to a cabinet, and took out a notebook, an ordinary black-and-white student's composition book, of the type still being sold today, even in our age of the Internet. He cracked it open and I saw blizzard of ink. I remember that the ink on the page was bright blue, as mid-century ink on older manuscripts tends to be, and there were a lot of cross-outs and

ink blotches. There was no mistaking Father's pride in it, of being entrusted with it. He opened it to a random page, and placed it carefully on my lap, as if laying a newborn baby there. I remember how intense the writing was! It literally seemed carved into the page, and I had to touch it. I knew I shouldn't, but I did, laying my hand, with fingers splayed, right on the words.

This was a scene I would later immortalize in one of my own novels, when a young man lays his hand on the writing of an older monk he admires – but gets it slapped away. Father Irenaeus, I'm happy to report, did not slap my hand away, but indulged me, smiling, perhaps touched by my interest in his friend. I touched Merton's handwriting, and it was like the blessing you might receive from a relic, or on Candlemas day. And I believe, not to get too grand about it, I was ordained as a writer that day and had my vocation bestowed upon me. And so this was my special grace: to have worked with Father Irenaeus, and come to know him as the thoroughly unique, loving and loyal individual that he was; and through him, to come to know the man and writer who would go on to play such an important role in my own development as a writer and novelist.

Decades later, I would return to Friedsam Library, in hopes of identifying that book Father Irenaeus had laid on my lap. With the kind help of Paul Spaeth, I was able to find it: now neatly bound and carefully preserved within the Merton Archives, I realized it had indeed been one of his "Bonaventure" journals, written during his time as a spiritually wracked English instructor and included in the first volume of his complete journals, *Run to the Mountain*.¹⁵ But I was only allowed to study a black-and-white photocopy, the original that I had pawed over years before now safely preserved and filed away in climate-controlled comfort. Paul Spaeth did kindly show me a glimpse of it, and I immediately recognized that distinctive, marine-blue ink that remained lodged in my memory for decades.

Father Irenaeus left Saint Bonaventure two years after I did, but in a more permanent way. He had been having trouble with his heart, in these last few years, and we all knew this. He had always been a tremendous fan of the Bonnies basketball team (back then, the Brown Indians – and I do recall seeing him at a game or two) but could only stay through the first half, out of concern that the excitement of a close finish might harm his heart. But at last his heart did give out. As his good friend Naomi Burton Stone writes, "The physical heart faltered, put him in the hospital, but the spirit always prevailed" (Stone). On January 27, 1981, he went to work at the library as usual, but that night took ill. He died the next morning in an ambulance on the way to the hospital, at the age of 78. "Part of his legacy to me," Naomi Stone goes on to write, "is a well-worn, dog-eared Christmas card which says, 'How often we seek great things to do for God and neglect the simple things close at hand that He has chosen for us.'"

In Father Irenaeus' archive, I found a touching handwritten letter from Robert Lax to Bertha Housey, who had worked as Father's secretary for many years, just following Father's death: "He is certainly being just who he's always been but in a better place, and in a way that brings him closer to us than he was before."¹⁶ Thomas Spencer, whom I remember as one of the reference librarians who also worked with Father, wrote a moving tribute to him that appeared in *The Cord*: "Although little noted, the part played by Father Irenaeus in Merton's decision to pursue a religious vocation was substantial. Merton would frequently return from walks in the nearby woods and ask his librarian friend countless questions about the meaning of life and God's existence."¹⁷ "I can't always prove this to my more scholarly associates," Father Irenaeus once told a journalist, "but sometimes the heart – not the head – should be our guide."¹⁸

He is buried atop a hill in the friars' section of Saint Bonaventure Cemetery, nestled in among his fellow Franciscans, in a spot affording a glorious view of the Allegheny foothills. I stopped to visit after I finished my research and paused for a long moment by his grave, remembering the vibrant, cheerful and loving man that he was – a friend to all, but in particular, a special friend to Thomas Merton.¹⁹

1. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948) 239; subsequent references will be cited as “SSM” parenthetically in the text.
2. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984) 115.
3. Michael N. McGregor, *Pure Act: The Uncommon Life of Robert Lax* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015) 81.
4. The archives of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University contain five letters from Irenaeus to Merton and eight letters from Merton to Irenaeus, three of which are published in Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy: Letters to New and Old Friends*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989) 295-97; subsequent references will be cited as “RJ” parenthetically in the text.
5. Irenaeus visited Gethsemani in August 1964: see Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963-1965*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) 136.
6. Naomi Burton Stone, *Olean Times Herald* (February 1981), clipping of a brief article written following Fr. Irenaeus' death (Irenaeus Herscher archives, Friedsam Memorial Library, St. Bonaventure University [SBU], Olean, NY); subsequent references will be cited as “Stone” parenthetically in the text.
7. Ellis Island database search results for “Josef Herscher.”
8. Irenaeus Herscher, “Autobiography” (unpublished: Herscher Archives, SBU); subsequent references will be cited as “Herscher, ‘Autobiography’” parenthetically in the text.
9. Website of the Altman Foundation, which still exists and awards funds: altmanfoundation.org.
10. Irenaeus Herscher, “I introduced Tom to St. Therese,” *Saint Anthony Messenger* 86 (Dec. 1978) 35; subsequent references will be cited as “Herscher, ‘Therese’” parenthetically in the text.
11. At the 2017 Fifteenth General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society, held at St. Bonaventure on June 15-18, a prayer service featuring readings from *The Seven Storey Mountain* was held at the grotto on campus, with a procession beginning at the adjacent St. Thérèse shrine.
12. John J. Crockett, “Rev. Irenaeus Herscher O.F.M.,” *The Historic Annals of Southwestern New York* 3 (1940) 99-101.
13. Elizabeth Houlihan, “A Bride’s Prayer,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune* (21 June 1959) 7.5.
14. Ray Cave, “St. Bonaventure Is Second-Best,” *Sports Illustrated* (6 March 1961) 24.
15. Thomas Merton, *Run to the Mountain: The Story of a Vocation. Journals, vol. 1: 1939-1941*, ed. Patrick Hart (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995).
16. Robert Lax to Bertha Housey (February 1981) (Herscher Archives, SBU).
17. Thomas T. Spencer, “Irenaeus Herscher O.F.M.: An Appreciation,” *The Cord* 33 (Feb. 1983) 34-38; see also Thomas T. Spencer, “‘Tom’s Guardian Angels’: Merton’s Franciscan Mentors,” *The Merton Seasonal* 26.2 (Summer 2001) 17-22 and Thomas T. Spencer, “The Mentoring Relationship of Irenaeus Herscher OFM, and Thomas Merton,” *Catholic Library World* 73.1 (Sept. 2002) 25-28.
18. Catherine Jandoli, “Father Irenaeus’ Secret Weapon,” *The Reign of the Sacred Heart* (August 1956) 23.
19. A special thanks to Paul Spaeth, director of Friedsam Memorial Library, and archivist Dennis Frank for graciously allowing me access to both the Merton Archive and also Father Irenaeus’ personal archives, and for all of their kind help in putting together this piece.