Frawley, William (1887-1966) Encyclopedia Article

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Contents

Frawley, William (1887-1966) Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Frawley, William (1887-1966).....3

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William "Bill" Frawley left his mark on American cinema during the 1930s as one of the medium's first character actors. Appearing in more than 150 films from *Miracle on 34th Street* to *Huckleberry Finn,* the strong-faced Iowan depicted surly, middle-aged men who hid their compassion behind masks of crustiness. He later adapted his trademark role to the small screen where he created two of television's most memorable supporting roles: Fred Mertz on the *I Love Lucy* show (1951-1957) and "Bub" O'Casey on *My Three Sons* (1960-1964).

Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz selected Frawley for the role of Fred Mertz after their first choice, Gale Gordon, turned out to be unavailable. CBS executives warned Ball and Arnaz against the choice: Frawley had a reputation for heavy drinking. Yet the veteran actor rose to the occasion and created in Fred Mertz the prototype of the stick-in-the-mud husband and penny-pinching landlord. He even managed to tolerate Vivian Vance, who played his on-screen wife Ethel Mertz, although the two strongly disliked each other. "She's one of the finest girls to come out of Kansas," he once observed, "But I often wish she'd go back there." After the *I Love Lucy* show, Frawley created the role of Michael Francis "Bub" O'Casey, Fred MacMurray's gruff father-in-law and housekeeper on the sitcom *My Three Sons.* William Demarest replaced him on his retirement in 1964. Fittingly, Frawley's last television appearance was a cameo on a 1965 episode of Lucille Ball's *The Lucy Show* entitled "Lucy and the Countess Have a Horse Guest." On that episode, Lucy Carmichael (Ball) jokes about how familiar Frawley seems to her. As Fred Mertz, whose name is almost synonymous with the old neighborhood landlord, Frawley is equally familiar to us all.

Further Reading:

Andrews, Bart. *Lucy & Ricky & Fred & Ethel: The Story of "I Love Lucy."* New York, Dutton, 1976.

Wyman, Ric B. *For The Love of Lucy: The Complete Guide For Collectors and Fans.* New York, Abbeville Press, 1995.

McClay, Michael. *I Love Lucy: The Complete Picture History of the Most Popular TV Show Ever.* New York, Warner Books, 1995.