From Huts to Houses

By ALFRED GOURGE
Staff Writer, Public Relations Branch, OLC Hesse

PERSONS WALKING past the wooded area on the edge of Darmstadt noticed last year that something was afoot. Trees began to disappear, and the tangled accumulation of leaves and roots and shrubs. Piles of material, much of it renovated rubble, appeared in the cleared spaces.

Then, passers-by noticed, foundations were laid and concrete mixers began turning out blocks which became, in time, the walls of compact, two-story buildings. The wooded place had turned into a new community, and its silence was broken by the sounds of family life and the continuing noise of construction hammers.

To build the first 19 houses in the community had taken more than a year, but the ambition for it had begun much earlier.

Hungarian-German expellees — 35,000 of them in Hesse — spent the first few postwar years shifting from camp to camp, and eventually settled down in bare refugee settlements, old barracks and hut-camps. They longed for clean, permanent homes to replace those they had lost in Hungary.

One group of Protestant Hungarian expellees was banded together on the outskirts of Darmstadt. They lived in old Nissen huts, which, covered with boards, looked like giant, half-submerged barrels, giving little comfort or protection. The expellee band, weary of squalor, decided to do something.

ENDOWED WITH SKILLED craftsmen — carpenters and masons — and a willingness to work hard, they took it on themselves to fell the trees, make the cement, construct the houses. Not just the menfolk — the ones who worked eight hours at jobs in industrial Darmstadt and came home to start house-building — but the wives, grandmothers and able-bodied children of every family went to work. The old people, including an octogenarian who left a hospital bed, and the youngsters did preparatory work during the day. The wage-earners devoted their evenings and weekends.

The first clearing began in April 1949, under the direction of engineer Gerold Steinsch, and on October 8, 1950, the first 19 homes were ready for occupancy.

Dedication ceremonies, held in early morning, were typical of the workers. Church services were held and then the entire community pitched in to move the first families to the homes. Women prepared a lunch for the settlers, their friends and well-wishers.

The houses are sturdy, five-room concrete buildings, designed for two families each. Each home contains two kitchens, one bath, two cellars, storeroom, a washroom and bedrooms, and includes a garden plot and area to keep small livestock. Rent on the houses will go to pay back the loans received in the name of the Hungarians' construction co-operative. Their months of negotiations had garnered them temporary credit from the city of Darmstadt, a building loan from the German "immediate aid" (Sohlthilfe) and a financial boost from the Lutheran World Union. They have at least 25 years to pay off the debt.

This is not the only aid they had. The city of Darmstadt allowed the group to buy, at a purely nominal charge, the 30 wooded acres on which their community is under
Hungarian expellees wore Sunday best on day of dedication.

construction. Moreover, a group of 32 Mennonites, Americans, Dutch, Norwegians, Germans and Italians, busy on work projects in Germany, took a turn at construction on the expellee settlement.

Perhaps the most noteworthy development of all has been the linking of this settlement with others in the immediate vicinity. To acquire together what might be impossible alone, the Hungarians have joined with a refugee group from Bukovina, which is now trying to build its own homes, and with a native Hessian group living in already established houses. The three have mapped plans for a community church and school (already finished, and one of the most modern in the state), and eventually a common sports field and stadium, a swimming pool and community center.

This type of inter-community co-operation has won the praise of Dr. James R. Newman, US state commissioner for Hesse, and Peter Stanne, HICOG Displaced Populations adviser in Hesse.

According to Dr. Newman, the voluntary absorption by all parties points the way to future integration of expellee and refugee elements among themselves and the German community of peoples.

Perhaps the answer to the future life of all expellees can be taken from a motto hanging on the wall of one of the new Darmstadt homes:

"God does not leave a man who does not leave himself."

Old Treaties May Be Revised

The Allied High Commission has invited the Federal Republic — and other interested countries are being invited through diplomatic channels — to inform the High Commission of those treaties of the former German Reich which they would like to see revived and made effective as between the Federal Republic and the country concerned.

This action is an important first step in implementation of the Foreign Ministers' decisions in this sphere. At New York in September the ministers reaffirmed their desire to integrate the Federal Republic into the community of free nations and they recognized that the Federal Government is the only German government freely and legitimately constituted and therefore entitled to speak for Germany as representative of the German people in foreign affairs.

The Federal Government has already given an interim reply to the High Commissioners' request. It has stated that work is going ahead on a memorandum concerning the prewar treaties and agreements the Federal Government would wish to have made applicable in the territory of the Federal Republic.

In principle, where the Federal Republic and the other power or powers concerned jointly desire that effect shall be given to a particular treaty, the High Commission will agree to this action. In acting upon these requests, the High Commission will of course have regard to such considerations as the avoidance of prejudice to the eventual peace settlement with Germany and the avoidance of conflict with the Occupation Statute or with the terms of any agreement relating to or affecting Germany to which the Occupying Powers are parties.

Women prepared community meal for opening-day well-wishers. Right, this housewife and her husband built their new home.