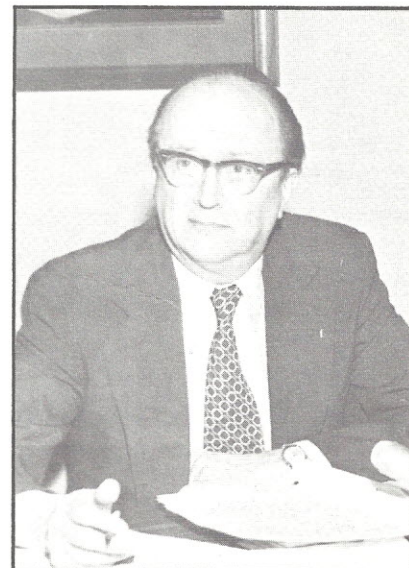


George Krambles



Chicago's renaissance man in transit



Above: Executive Director Krambles gives his monthly update at CTA Board meeting.

Left: In 1936 as an apprentice on his first job with the Indiana Railroad, he qualified as a motorman of electric interurban trains.

Below: In 1976 as CTA General Manager, he was at the controls to test Chicago's newest rapid transit cars.

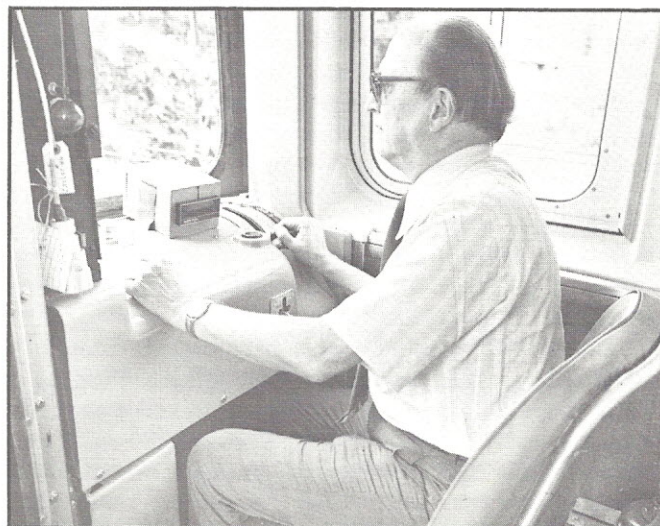
George Krambles, the CTA Executive Director who retires April 1, has become a legend in his own time as a renaissance man in transit, so proficient has he been in so many different things.

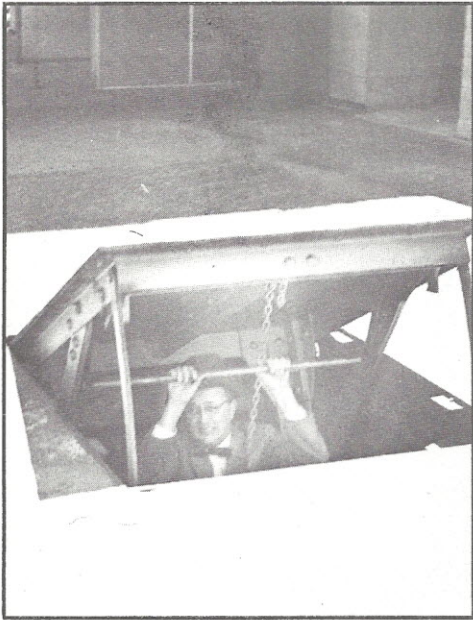
By academic training, he is a professional engineer with a degree in railway electrical engineering--a degree which, unfortunately for the transit industry, is no longer offered at the University of Illinois where he was graduated with honors in 1936.

His years of high performance have brought out many talents and have cast him in a variety of meaningful roles...as an administrator, researcher and planner, innovator, writer, lecturer, expert in graphic arts, consultant and troubleshooter, project manager, world traveler, and specialist in operations and service.

Those who have worked closely with him also know him as an unwavering perfectionist who, although very demanding, was always fair and never asked anything of others he couldn't do himself. He always sought the very best for the CTA and its riders.

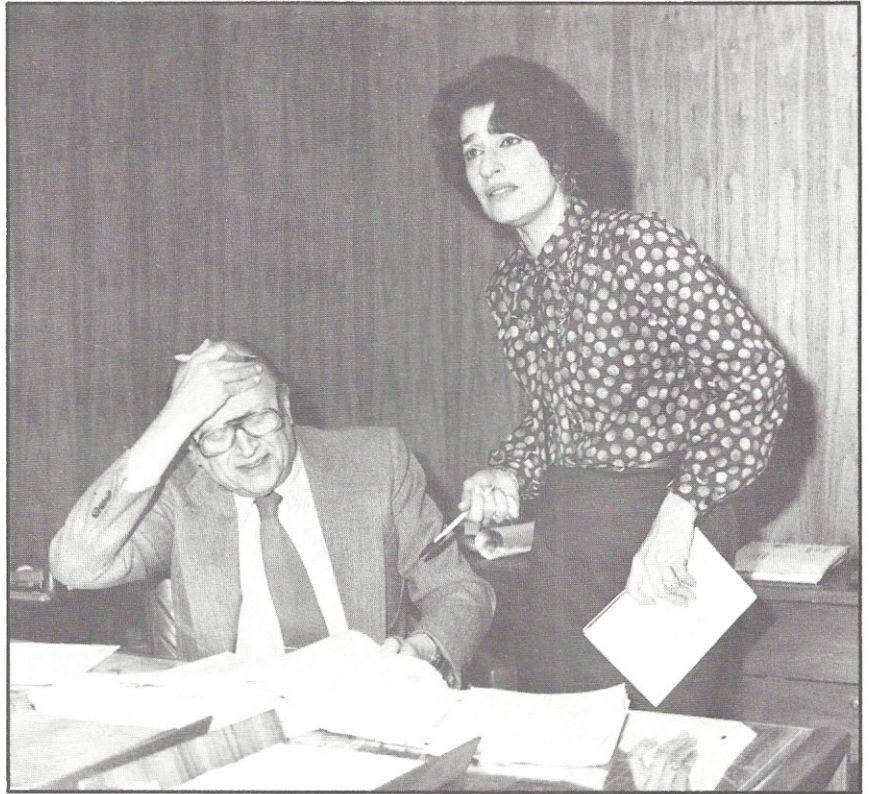
(Continued Page 2)





Above: Krambles, shown here emerging from a subway emergency exit at State street and Wacker drive, "could be expected to show up at any time and any place on the system."

Right: "What in the world is this?" he asks Mary Boski, his administrative secretary.



Krambles admits to having several idiosyncrasies, all for good reason and purpose.

As an administrator, he insisted upon processing every matter as quickly as possible and then attaching "a string to it to make sure it got done."

With equal fervor, he made a precise written record of every step taken in solving a problem and then made certain that such documentation was properly filed so that it could be retrieved at a moment's notice.

With the able assistance of his administrative secretary, Mary Boski, his office was so efficient that on more than one occasion it served as a proving ground for other CTA secretaries seeking higher training.

His office clock was really only used to make certain that appointments were kept on time. The rest of the CTA's general office in the Merchandise Mart closed at a customary 4:30 p.m. Krambles was always at his desk until 6 p.m., or later, often on Saturdays as well as weekdays.

Staff sessions in his office often went far beyond the normal quitting time, in which case Krambles usually assuaged any weariness by inviting participants to join him for Greek chicken at a nearby spa where he always picked up the check.

Shortly after Krambles was appointed, on Feb. 5, 1976, as general manager (a title later changed to executive director), one of the first to learn about his Saturday working hours was Roy Colcord, a short, wiry electrician assigned by an outside contractor to the CTA floors.

Liking to work Saturdays when he wouldn't bother

anyone, Roy was busy on a special job of wiring the CTA Board room for a public address system with speakers in the ceiling. He had wiggled into a small space between the drop-ceiling and the regular ceiling when he heard a rustling below.

Suspecting an office prowler, Roy yelled through a hole in the ceiling, "Who in the hell are you?"

"The general manager!" came back the reply. "Who and where in the hell are you?"

Like so many others at the CTA, Roy learned that Krambles could be expected to show up at any time and any place on the system.

In recent years, he was apt to make his presence known electronically--by his car radio or walkie-talkie. His apartment in Oak Park overlooks the end of the Lake street "L" line, and there have been times he helped to clear up an operating problem simply by looking out his window and using his walkie-talkie.

While he has also been expert in surface operations, his true love has been electric railways, the elevated and subway system. Because of this, he has traveled widely, in this and other countries, to inspect the systems, to serve as a consultant, and to learn about new technology. It has also been his hobby, and he holds the No.1 membership card in the Central Electric Railfans' Association, of which he was a co-founder 41 years ago.

Why and when he became obsessed with electric railways is uncertain. Others in his family had no such interest. He has always ridden the "L," and he thinks his first rides probably were when his parents took him on the south-side line which was near their home at 29th street and Calumet avenue where he was



Krambles, who always took time out to greet visitors, shows the new Control Center to Samuel Insull, Jr., retired electric railway executive whose father was prominent in the development of the electric utility industry. With Insull in their Jan., 1978, visit to CTA were William D. Middleton (left rear), a railroad historian, and Norman Carlson (right rear) vice president and treasurer of the Central Electric Railfans' Association.

born on March 11, 1915.

After a brief move to "Greek town" in the Ravenswood community, the family moved farther north to Rogers Park, near Rogers avenue and Sheridan road, close to the Howard elevated line, which then was also used by the North Shore interurban trains. Krambles remembers distinctly seeing, at the age of seven, the city's first all-steel elevated cars, conspicuous by their green and orange paint.

Half way through high school he decided to make electric railways his career. After two years at Crane Junior College, he had a choice between the University of Illinois at Urbana and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at Troy, N.Y., the only schools offering an engineering specialty in electric railways.

It was an easy decision. The U. of I. was closer to home, less expensive as a state university, and was well known as a recruiting ground for engineering graduates by the Chicago Surface Lines and the Chicago Rapid Transit Company, the two private companies that later were to be acquired for the creation of the Chicago Transit Authority as a public agency.

Upon graduation from the U. of I. in June of 1936, which was still in the depths of the depression, Krambles was unable to get a job in Chicago, but he was hired as an apprentice at \$70 a month by the Indiana Railroad, operator of an electric interurban system serving county seats almost from one end of the Hoosier state to the other.

From June to December of that year, working first in Indianapolis and then in Anderson, Krambles did a little bit of everything. He toted packages in the freight house, became a union member (on Oct. 1,

1936) of the Amalgamated Association of Street, Electric Railway and Motor Coach Employees of America, worked as an electrical repairman on cars, and qualified to drive trains.

So keen, however, was his desire to get back to Chicago that he turned down a raise of \$30 a month, quit his job in Indiana, and sent a letter to Bernard J. Fallon, the top official of the North Shore interurban line.

Fallon's response, dated Feb. 1, 1937, seems particularly significant because it shows how much interest transit executives of that era took in recruiting promising professional employees.

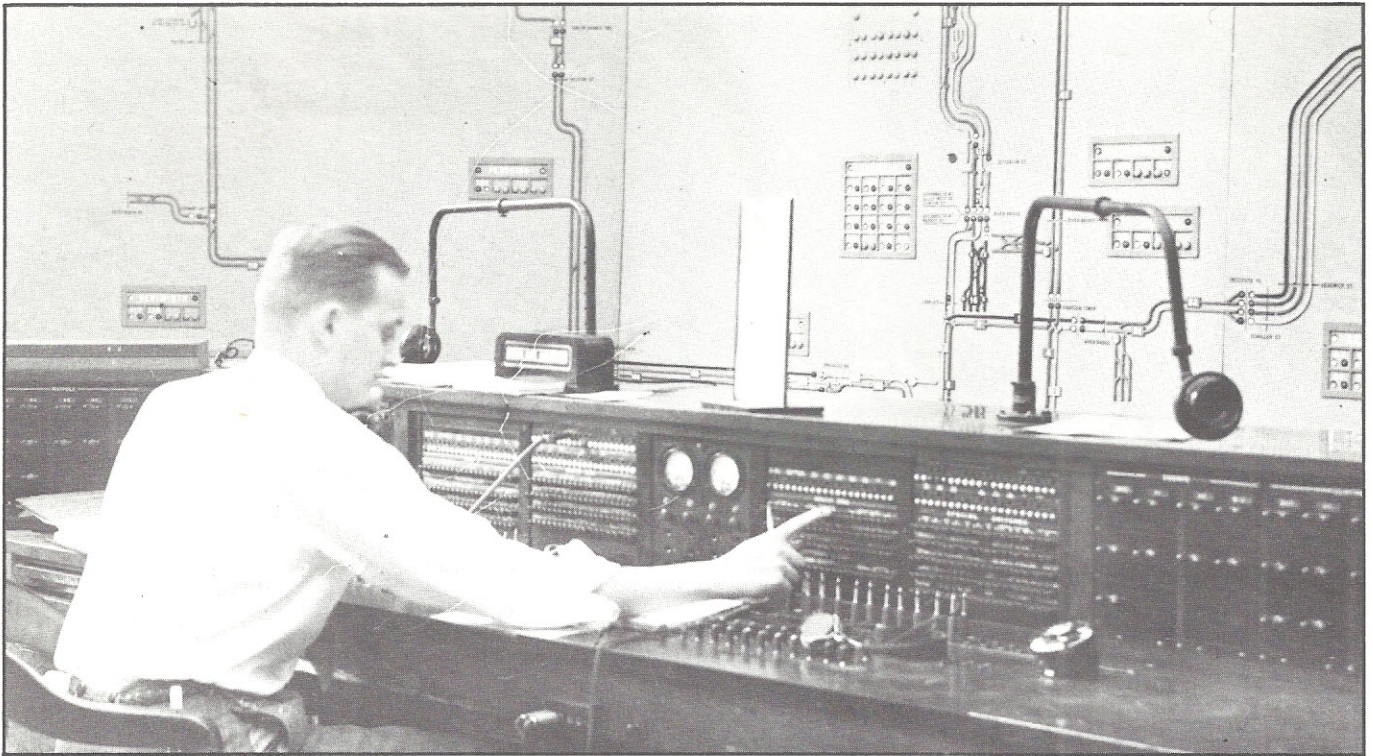
That letter from Fallon read in part:

"I am sorry to advise you that we have no opening on the interurban line at the present time, but I have talked about you with Mr. H. A. Johnson, General Manager of the Chicago Rapid Transit Company, over whose lines the interurbans operate, and I think if you will call on him he may be able to find something that would be of interest to you in connection with this line."

Krambles obviously wasted no time in following up, for two days after Fallon had sent the letter--on Feb. 3, 1937--Krambles, at age of not quite 22, began his Chicago transit career--as a "temporary employe" classified as a student engineer.

Actually, Krambles was hired by the Chicago Rapid Transit Company because of a crisis. Prophetically, it was not to be the only time Krambles was to help solve a crisis-oriented problem.

There had been a serious accident with fatalities at the Granville station on the north elevated route. A heavy North Shore interurban train had rammed a



In the power supervisor's office of the Chicago Rapid Transit Company in the Edison Building, 72 W. Adams st., in 1941.

standing elevated train of wooden cars. The rear "L" car was sheared in half, part falling off the embankment right-of-way.

The regulatory Illinois Commerce Commission issued an order for improving cars as a safety measure. Skokie Shop, which had been closed because of hard times, was reopened; and Krambles was among those assigned to design improvements.

As the years have shown, that initial assignment was to set, in large measure, the pattern of Krambles' career. While he has carried out a great variety of assignments, much of his work has been related to improvements, in equipment, operations and service.

In 1938, the city began construction of the State street subway; and engineers of the Rapid Transit Company were given important assignments for this first-of-its-kind project in Chicago. Among other things, Krambles helped with plans for the third-rail power distribution system.

You can imagine his elation on Oct. 17, 1943, when he had the honor of turning on the power for the official start of State street subway operations. Incidentally, Krambles was given the signal for the power by George DeMent, who then was with the city's Department of Subways and Superhighways and who later was to serve as CTA Chairman.

Part of Krambles' work on the subway involved the preparation of technical documents, one of which dealt with "How To Splice Lead-Covered Cable and Rubber-Insulated Cable." Besides his ability to handle highly technical subjects, this document also pointed up Krambles' artistic flair that went well beyond the engineering requisite of being a draftsman. Illustrated

with drawings, the text consisted of 2,000 words in hand lettering. Many times later, at the CTA, Krambles' talent in graphic arts was reflected in station signs, posters and other illustrated material.

During his early years with the Rapid Transit Company, one of his bosses was an especially hard taskmaster, Harrison D. Wilson, distribution engineer in the electrical department, whose exacting demands were to stand Krambles in good stead for almost everything that came afterwards.

For budget purposes, costs of electrical work had to be analyzed and accurately computed in such terms as so much money per foot. Completing his first assignment, Krambles submitted a brief memorandum that consisted of little more than the cost figure.

"No!" exclaimed his boss, Wilson, tossing the memo back at Krambles, apparently in disbelief.

"Why?" stammered Krambles.

"You find out," shot back Wilson.

The next day, Krambles returned, and again laid the short memo with the cost figure on Wilson's desk.

"No!" shouted Wilson.

"Yes!" retorted Krambles, who then laid down a second lengthy memorandum showing exactly how he had arrived at the answer.

That experience probably explains why Krambles has always been so careful to document everything. It might well be a clue also to another Krambles idiosyncrasy. An inner-office memorandum, he feels, should be short and to the point. If there is more to be explained, that can just as well be done in an attachment.

In keeping with this preference for conciseness,



Above: Driving a new CTA 9600 series bus, Jan. 5, 1977.



Right: In the staff engineer's office on Dec. 11, 1953, Krambles, operations planning engineer, and Frank Misek, engineering assistant, examine an engineering drawing.

Krambles has reduced, for biographical reference, his many years of varied experience, professional affiliations and other activities to a single page.

In reference to his degree from the University of Illinois, it is also noted that his baccalaureate thesis was entitled the "Development of the Interurban Car" and that he obtained additional credits in railway civil and railway mechanical engineering.

His 43 years of experience in transit in Chicago are summed up as follows:

- One year equipment engineering.
- One year engineering cost accounting and analysis.
- Six years power distribution, electrical control, station lighting, and drainage and ventilation system engineering.
- One year power system dispatching.
- Thirteen years operations planning, rapid transit service control, system design, construction, implementation and training, the integration of bus, streetcar and rapid transit systems, streetcar-to-bus conversion, equipment assignment planning, community relations, and commission and management hearings.
- Four years transportation operations and real-time administration of bus and rapid transit service over 150 routes.
- Two years federal demonstration project construction, operation, administration and preparation of reports (the Skokie Swift project).
- Seven years in charge of system planning and research as related to service.
- Two years in charge of transportation and vehicle maintenance departments.

--Two years General Operations Manager.

--Four years General Manager and Executive Director.

During all those years, there was hardly anything of significance--particularly in the way of improvements--that didn't have the Krambles imprint.

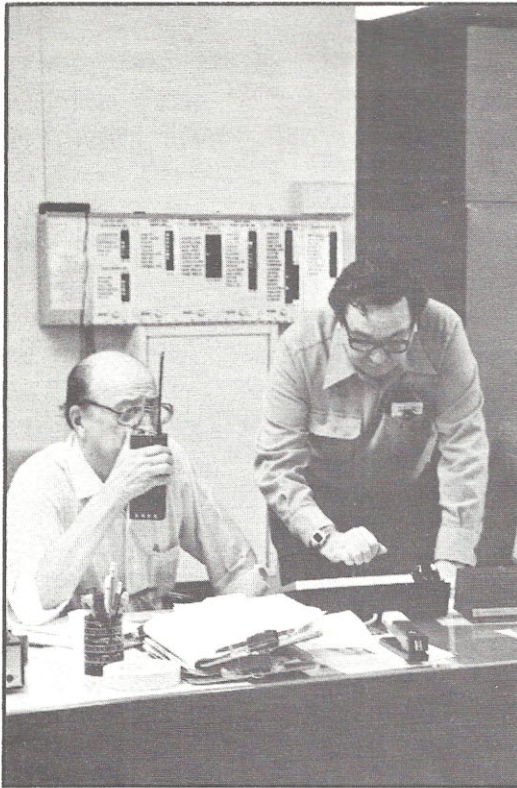
In the early 1950s, he was deeply involved in the revamping of the rapid transit system for greater efficiency and for eliminating unnecessary duplication of service with surface operations.

With no adverse effect on overall riding, the number of stations was reduced from 240 to the present 140 stations through the elimination of little-used lines such as Kenwood, Normal Park, Humboldt Park, Stockyards and Westchester and the outer end of the Douglas. The skip-stop pattern of A and B stations was instituted.

As a result, the average speed of trains was increased considerably; and the requirement of rolling stock was reduced from 1,600 cars to the present fleet of 1,100.

Another major CTA development was that of the all-electric rapid transit car with electrical braking, as an application of the former P.C.C. (Green Hornet) streetcar concept. Because of the electrical braking and no need to pump up air for brakes, the CTA has the only system for which cars can be started and pulled immediately out of the yards.

Krambles also had a hand in the CTA's big change of converting surface operations from streetcars to motor buses, which took place over a 10-year period ending in 1958. In this change, 100 off-street bus terminals were created, with the CTA paying for the



Above: "... and if I had had a broom, I would have swept up the place, too," he once told the CTA Board. Photo taken at Dempster terminal of Skokie Swift, 1964.

Left: With new walkie-talkie, Krambles gives emergency orders from Control Center during winter crisis in January of 1979. At his side is James Blaa, manager, Transportation.

land and other costs. This switch to all-bus operation also was accompanied by the construction of three new garages and other similar improvements.

Over many years, Krambles has had a significant part in the development of a modern Operations Control Center for both buses and trains. In the last several years, his zest for this project, involving mostly the creation of radio communications, was not unlike that of a boy overjoyed with a new toy.

If Krambles were to be asked to pinpoint the happiest moment of his career, the chances are he would recall the time when Walter J. McCarter, the long-time CTA General Manager, assigned him as project manager to create the Skokie Swift, the non-stop suburban shuttle service that was the nation's first federally funded demonstration (experimental) project in the rapid transit field.

On April 18, 1964, Krambles was almost beside himself when he announced, "We're off on the world's fastest rapid transit ride," as a three-car train left the Howard terminal for the inaugural run over a five-mile stretch of former North Shore interurban right-of-way which the CTA had acquired for the new service to Dempster street, Skokie.

With 26-year-old Bruce Anderson as the motorman, that inaugural train reached a speed of 70 miles an hour, completing the five miles in exactly 6 minutes, a half minute less than the running time scheduled for regular service which began two days later. (Earlier Ed Mitchell had driven the first test train.)

So successful was Skokie Swift that two years later the federal government suggested that the CTA refund some \$200,000 of a federal grant of \$349,217 that had

been contributed to the demonstration project, although the "feds" did not press the claim.

Now, in these times of inflation and deflated dollars, it is hard to believe how little the Skokie Swift project cost. The federal grant of \$349,217 represented two-thirds of a net project cost of \$523,825. The remaining \$174,608 of the net cost was split, with the CTA paying \$137,415 (26.2 per cent) and the Village of Skokie \$37,193 (7.1 per cent). Federal funds then could not be used for right-of-way acquisition, so the CTA, which had also needed half of the right-of-way for access to Skokie Shop, paid all of a \$1.7 million cost for the five miles of the abandoned North Shore route.

The main objective of Skokie Swift, as a two-year demonstration project, was to determine if good, fast rapid transit trains could induce suburbanites to abandon their automobiles in favor of mass transportation. Skokie Swift has been doing that very successfully ever since, carrying more than 7,000 riders a day.

The success of Skokie Swift brought Krambles to the attention of editors and reporters who came to know him as an excellent and ready source of information on almost every phase of transit. His answers to questions could also be very imaginative and at the same time very pragmatic.

For instance, in a Chicago Tribune article dated June 17, 1970, he gave an especially graphic answer to a question of whether Chicago's Loop could exist without the CTA and the other public transportation carriers, all of which carry nearly 85 per cent of the people in and out of this downtown area.



"We're off on the world's fastest rapid transit ride," announces Krambles at the start of the inaugural run, April 18, 1964, of Skokie Swift.



After the inaugural run of Skokie Swift. Front row, in uniform: Louis Mueller, John Bork, Patrick O'Malley, Merrill Anthony, Larry Jelinek, Edward Mitchell, Charles Banser, Bill Limanowski. Standing (left to right): James Lahey, Harold Eichaker, Thomas Stiglic, George Riley,

Elmer Milz, John Zupko, Thomas Boyle, Marty Shannon, Leonard Wiksten, Edward Heatter, Glen Anderson, John Brucker, Thomas Lyons, Bruce Anderson, Les Reichard, Heinz Doering, Terry McGovern, Robert Benny, C. J. (Bud) Buck, George Krambles, Robert Winther.

"It would be an impossible situation," said Krambles, "unless you had billions of dollars and could tear down the Loop and start building again."

Noting that automobiles on expressways carried an average of only 1.4 persons per trip, he explained that it would take 204,928 autos to carry the nearly 287,000 Loop-bound persons then using the CTA.

"To get those additional 204,928 autos downtown, you would first have to build 136 additional in-bound lanes of expressway, as compared with a present 30 in-bound lanes of expressways," he said.

"Then, to park those 204,928 autos there would have to be 61 million square feet of new parking space. That space is roughly equivalent to four times the ground area of the presently defined Loop, as bounded on the north and west by the river and on the south by Roosevelt road.

"In other words, you would have to tear down all of the buildings in this Loop area, create four levels of parking over the whole area, and then build new buildings on top of this mass of four-level parking.

"But even if you were to do all that, it still wouldn't work," he concluded. "No one probably would be able to live because of the pollution."

Krambles' knack for distinct expression has been sharpened by years of experience, both as a writer and lecturer. His biographical listing names 10 universities where he has participated in seminar lectures, but he has spoken also to many other audiences, both here and abroad.

For illustrating talks and technical papers, he can draw upon his own personal collections of thousands of slides and photographs. His Oak Park apartment

is crowded with file cabinets of reference material. At the end of every year he has his accumulation of subscription journals and periodicals bound in hard covers by a professional bookbinder.

Secretaries in his office have had little use for their shorthand skills, for, instead of dictating, he has always written everything by hand, in a style similar to that of an old-fashioned school teacher.

He has been a prolific writer since his early years in the staff engineer's office. Technical documents and reports on studies for in-house use have accounted for much of his writing. Because of this ability, he also was given an extra job of editing reports and papers written by other staff members.

For many years, he wrote with regular lead pencils. In editing, however, he formed a habit of using a red pencil for contrast.

His editing with a red pencil could be so profuse that it would virtually obliterate the original text. A staff assistant who had just gotten back some heavily edited copy from Krambles was once heard muttering to himself, "Holy cow, what a bloody mess this is!"

About 10 years ago, his secretary, Mary Boski, who liked to remember such occasions with a small gift, gave Krambles a pen with red ink for his birthday. From then on, red ink became an exclusive Krambles trademark. He used the red pen for everything, including his succinct notations and instructions on memos returned to his staff.

Other CTA executives took up the practice by using colors such as green and brown, but Mary was the only other person to use red ink. She explained that she "got to be pretty good at imitating" Krambles'



Left: The CTA's historic rapid transit train (cars 4271 and 4272) was restored under Krambles' direction in 1974. The train is often used for chartered trips.

Below: Krambles (center) and Paul Kadowaki (right) superintendent, Bus Instruction, visit Keifuku station in Kyoto, Japan, in 1975.

Bottom: Two international visitors, André Jacobs (second from left), Secretary General, Union Internationale des Transports Publics, and Roger Belin (third from left), Chairman of the Board, Regie Autonome des Transports Parisiens, are shown the Jefferson Park transit center by Krambles on Sept. 9, 1976. At left is Harold Geissenheimer, CTA General Operations Manager.

hand and that by using red on notes to other offices she "never failed to get a quick response."

It was a bit of irony that just as Krambles would get accustomed to a certain red-ink pen the manufacturer would discontinue the model. After having been frustrated by three such experiences of discontinued models, he ended up by simply using red-ink refills with felt tips as pens.

By no means will retirement from the CTA mean inactivity for Krambles. He is a member of many professional organizations, and he is certain to remain active with such organizations as the American Public Transit Association and the Union Internationale des Transports Publics.

Off and on over the years, he has carried out consulting and troubleshooting assignments for other transit and governmental agencies, in this and other countries. He is especially proud, for instance, of the help he once gave the Ministry of Transport of Israel in the planning of a rail system for Tel Aviv.

He has now planned a busy schedule for himself as a freelance consultant. On his retirement date of April 1, he will be on his way in this endeavor--by plane to Buenos Aires.

At the CTA, Krambles will leave behind many remembrances. Skokie Swift will be remembered as Krambles' project. Among many other things, he should not be forgotten for the fine example he set in dedication and loyalty to Chicago's transit system and its employees and riders.

And he certainly will be remembered for his high performance, for his demonstration of how important professionalism is to a well-managed public transportation system. The Krambles hallmark of professionalism is there for all to follow.

By Tom Buck

