ISU's Jennifer Attebery debuts new book on Swedish-American summer celebration

Submitted by
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POCATELLO — Idaho State University's Department of English and Philosophy chair Jennifer Eastman Attebery's most recent book "Pole Raising and Speech Making-Modalities of Swedish American Summer Celebration," has been published by Utah State University Press.

"I first became interested in Swedish holidays when living in Sweden," Attebery said. "I became aware of the very different set of holidays practiced in Sweden: No major autumn holidays, an intense set of major holidays during the wintertime, celebrating Easter with witches and bonfires, and one major holiday in the summer, called Midsummer."

This book focuses on the beginnings of the traditional Scandinavian Midsummer celebration and the surrounding spring-to-summer seasonal festivities in the Rocky Mountain West during the height of Swedish immigration to the area 1880 to 1917.

Combining research in folkloristics and history, Attebery explores various ways that immigrants blended traditional Swedish Midsummer-related celebrations with local civic celebrations of American Independence Day on July 4 and the Mormons' Pioneer Day on July 24.

Functioning as multimodal observations with multiple meanings, these holidays represent and reconsider ethnicity and panethiciry, sacred and secular relationships, and the rural and the urban, demonstrating how flexible and complex traditional celebrations can be, she said.

Attebery has twice enjoyed sojourns in Sweden, in 1988 as a Fulbright Senior Scholar at University of Gothenburg, and in 2011 as the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in American Studies at Uppsala University. Attebery is the author of "Up in the Rocky Mountains: Writing the Swedish Immigrant Experience." Her studies of Swedish culture in the Rocky Mountain West have also been published in Scandinavian Studies and Swedish-American Historical Quarterly.

"I hope that the project offers some new insights into the celebration of holidays, especially the way that some holidays express both sacred and secular values and the ways they used to include programs, speeches, songs — lots of words," Attebery said.