With cereal boxes and shoe boxes aimed skyward, children and science enthusiasts of all ages peered into the heavens Monday for a rare glimpse of the sun being eclipsed by the moon.

Feb. 26, 1979, was the last time a total eclipse was visible within the 48 contiguous states of the United States. Not since 1919 has an eclipse crossed both East and West coasts. Yesterday's event, called "The Great American Eclipse" by some, according to AccuWeather, because it's entire path was within the United States, was the first time that had happened since before the United States became a country in 1776, according to Reuters.

Reuters predicted $694 million dollars in lost productivity as workers took time off to view the celestial spectacle. All across Mount Airy, where the eclipse was 93.76 percent total, parking lots, sidewalks and open spaces contained people doing exactly that.

Mount Airy Museum of Regional History was the center of local activity with 70 to 75 people of all ages showing up for an eclipse viewing event at the museum with many of them arriving exactly at 1 p.m. when the event began, and more than an hour and a half before the eclipse would reach its peak.

"You'd think we were giving out gold from the sky," said Karen Nealis, administrative assistant, of the deluge of attendees.

Participants' time was well-spent building viewing boxes up on the third floor before moving down to the museum's courtyard to view the eclipse. Some people used eclipse glasses made for the occasion but plenty of others went DIY and converted cereal boxes, shoe boxes and small shipping boxes into viewing apparatuses to get a view of the eclipse without burning out their retinas.

James Caudill, 10, of Mount Airy, got the best results of anyone from a year-old recycled science project that he brought out for the occasion. His mom, Jennie Lowry, said "To be honest, when he made it, we didn't know anything about the eclipse coming up." She was pleasantly surprised James was able to find it. James' project was a large box with one open side and the eclipse was easy to follow just by looking into the box.

Other folks were not having such an easy time of it. “You kind of have to wiggle it around and get a little bit of light,” advised Sonya Laney, director of education for the museum, as she assisted children who were not having as much luck as James.

“It was like so awesome,” said Emma Edwards, age 5, after getting a good look at the eclipse through her Raisins, Dates and Pecans cereal box.

Harrison Lee, 8, of King, came to the museum with his grandmother, Nancy Jo Goad, of Mount Airy. Harrison got a look at the eclipse and said, “It’s kind of like a little tiny crescent moon and a string.”

Aubrey Lowe, who admits to being 70-something, enjoys celestial events and often watches meteor showers with his daughter. They stand back to back outdoors in the open so that between the two of them, they can see the whole sky until one of them spots some action.

Yesterday’s eclipse was a little easier to find.”It’s going to get pretty shady,” Lowe said, as 2:40 p.m., the time of maximum eclipse, approached, “It’s amazing how our scientists figured out exactly when it was going to happen. I don’t know how they gathered all that information.”

“I’m glad people were so excited about the eclipse,” said Sonya Laney of the event’s large turnout. As the eclipse came and went, with the sky darkening and the temperature dropping, with young and old alike impressed with the eclipse, Laney confessed she was afraid things might not have gone so well.

“I’m not so sure why I thought nature was going to be disappointing,” she said.

There will be another total eclipse on April 8, 2024, but the path of totality will be a bit further away from Mount Airy. The museum has not yet announced plans for a viewing event.