The new exhibit opens today to run through Sept. 3 at the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History. “A Forest Journey” was created by the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia. It sheds new light on the history of the use of wood throughout the world, on forest products (from paper to lifesaving pharmaceuticals) and on the relationship between forests and the benefits of trees. “We’ve got some pretty lackluster instructions,” said museum director Matt Edwards as he and a group of volunteers and staffers struggled on Wednesday to set up the new traveling exhibit. The exhibit arrived in eight large crates, only one of which fit into the museum’s elevator. “We were unpacking them in the gift shop, and ferrying them upstairs,” said Edwards.

The exhibit is the second in a series that are science-related and address a push for STEAM education (science, technology, engineering, art and math). Last year’s dinosaur exhibit was the first in the series. “We got funds from the N.C. Museum of Natural Science for the series,” said Edwards, “and they also fund our educational director position.” “It’s part of our broader mission. Art, natural history and science are not something we have focused on until the last few years.” Within those parameters, Edwards said the forestry exhibit was chosen primarily because of its size. “It was the smallest one available, and we are limited in space to about 1,500 square feet,” said Edwards. “Some of the others we were looking at required as much as 5,000 square feet.”

“This exhibit is highly interactive. We look for new and engaging ways to interact with our visitors. Most of the time, museums are telling everyone to ‘not touch,’ but people like to touch things, and this exhibit gives them a chance to do that.” “Seeing, reading, hearing hit different parts of your brain. This hits something else,” said events coordinator Kate Rauhauser-Smith, as she steadied a large, still precariously placed piece of the exhibit. “What’s it called?” “It’s called “kinesthetic learning,” answered Sonya Laney, director of education and programs, while crouched on the floor bolting exhibit pieces together. “We’ve got a pretty aggressive calendar of programs coordinated with the exhibit through Labor Day,” said Edwards.

“The last of the spring History Talks will be a screening of ‘America’s First Forest’ and discussion of the history and science of forestry in North Carolina,” said Laney, after freeing herself from her floor-bound crouch. “We hope schools who came to see the dinosaur exhibit will return,” said Edwards. “It’s hard to beat the wow factor of dinosaurs. That’s partly why we did dinosaurs the first year, to tell people we’re here. "While forestry may not seem to have the wow of dinosaurs, a good number of folks have a connection with forestry. It’s part of our human culture. The timber industry was big here, early on, and there were the furniture factories.”

The exhibit was inspired by the Harvard classic “A Forest Journey: The Role of Wood in the Development of Civilization” by science writer John Perlin.

• Jamie Lewis, historian at the Forest History Society, will present the museum’s final History Talk, “America’s First Forest: Carl Schenck and the Asheville Experiment,” on April 15, from 2-3:30 p.m.with a film screening of “America’s First Forest” and discussion of the history and science of forestry in North Carolina. History Talks are held on the third floor of the Museum and are free to the public.

• Homeschool Day at the Museum will be April 17, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. when students can spend the day at the museum and participate in a variety of science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics-based activities, as well as history, tour the museum and check out “A Forest Journey.” The cost is $7 per student, which includes all materials for crafts, hands-on activities, and museum admission. The cost is $5 per chaperone.