
"It gives me great pleasure to say that, among all the schools principals whom I have known, and in New York and Chicago I have met many, there is no one who surpasses Miss Abbott in energy, inspiration, adaptability and cheerful courage."

- Miss K. L. Maltby, Principal of the Nassau Institute, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mary Merriman Abbott, daughter of Anson F. and Nancy Merriman Abbott, was born the oldest of seven children on September 27, 1855. She was educated in the Waterbury public schools and entered Vassar College at a time when a collegiate education for women was a comparatively new idea. Her obituary in the *Waterbury American* reads: "Few women of her age are so widely known or so generally loved and respected as was Miss Abbott. A life long resident of the city and closely connected with its educational work since her early womanhood she was a prominent figure in its social life."

Miss Abbott graduated from Vassar with honors in 1878. She taught for four years at St. Margaret's Collegiate School at the corner of Cooke and Grove streets, but her driving ambition was to open a school of her own. In 1883, in association with Mrs. J. H. Yerkes, she opened the Hillside Avenue School near Cliff Street. This school, which was both a day and boarding school, included kindergarten, primary, junior and senior departments. Its complete course embraced four years, including a college preparatory course and an English course of shorter duration. At one point the school changed location to the corner of Hillside Avenue and Central Avenue until it was discontinued due to financial problems in 1892. At that point, Miss Abbott was appointed as a teacher at Waterbury High School (Crosby) where she taught English until shortly before her death in 1907.

The Hillside Avenue School was highly endorsed by many prominent 19th century Waterburians including Rev. Joseph Anderson of the First Church and C. P. Goss, treasurer of Scovill Manufacturing Company. Many members of the Goss family, along with children of many prominent Waterbury families, attended the Hillside Avenue School. Rev. Russell, rector of St. Margaret's School, commented, "She pursues her favorite calling with great enthusiasm and faithfulness and inspires her pupils with her own interest in intellectual pursuits. I consider her rarely well qualified for her chosen profession."

The Hillside School placed much importance on the sciences as well as the humanities. In the third year of the upper school or senior department, lessons in astronomy were given, enhanced by a telescope placed on the roof of the school.

Miss Abbott was also very prominent in club work, holding, for a number of years, the presidency of the State Federation of Clubs. A dynamic, fluent and engaging speaker, she lectured on educational topics in various parts of the country. As part of a national lecture series which included such notable intellectuals as Horace Greeley, she presented a lecture on astronomy in Waterbury in 1888.

She was a member of the Young Woman's Friendly League and served as vice-president. In 1880, when it was thought best to turn the Woman's Christian Temperance Union into a temperance school, Mary Abbott and Ellen Whitton took charge of it.



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Toward the end of her life, Miss Abbott resided at the Merriman family homestead near Taft School in Watertown. After the death of her younger sister, Mrs. F. B. Deane, Miss Abbott took charge of raising her sister's son.

At various times, she superintended the education of other boys committed to her care. When she became ill, she could not be persuaded to give up her work until a few weeks before having an operation in New Haven.

She died shortly thereafter on March 23, 1907.

In 1914 the Waterbury Board of Education named a new school at 450 Hill Street the Mary M. Abbott Grammar School.

The Women's Council of Education, of which the Connecticut Congress was a member, raised \$5,000 to create a scholarship fund at what is now Connecticut College in New London to honor the memory of Miss Abbott. The fund was completed in 1916. The first scholarship from the Abbott Memorial Fund was the Mary Merriman Abbott Memorial Scholarship in honor of the first president of Connecticut Woman's Council of Education. It is still awarded today.