Abbot was a community initiative. Handbills beckoned all favoring a “female high school” to meet February 19, 1828. An organizing committee resulted, and, on the Fourth of July, 1828, a constitution was approved and widow Sarah Abbot pledged a substantial bequest to secure loans (including one from the Phillips trustees) underwriting construction of a schoolhouse. Classes began May 6, 1829. In its early years, Abbot held public “examinations” in which all students participated. Theodosia Stockbridge, Abbot Class of 1837, recalled the experience. In her memoir, she notes “Theological, Latin and English students” in attendance. The Theological students were from the Andover Theological Seminary, opened under the aegis of the Phillips trustees in 1808. The Latin and English students attended Phillips Academy (distinguished by a college-preparatory classical curriculum) or the short-lived English Academy & Teachers Seminary (also under the aegis of the Phillips board) which trained teachers and “practical men for all the departments of common life.” The “Mr. Brown” who taught Theodosia Stockbridge – Samuel Gilman Brown, a student in the Theological Seminary – began a distinguished career in education as Abbot’s principal from 1835 to 1838 and concluded it as president of Hamilton College.

Our examination was held in the upper hall. The school was attired in uniform, a unique feature of which was a small black lace cap trimmed with narrow pink ribbon, a fashion then somewhat in vogue. At these semi-annual examinations, both dreaded and enjoyed by the pupils, the upper hall, doorway, vestibule and stairway were literally thronged with Theological, Latin, and English students, with friends from the village and friends from abroad. One of the most formidable ordeals was the drawing of geometrical diagrams on the blackboards, placed at the end of the aisles, on the platform extending along the south end of the hall; and also piano solos, given from the center of this platform, and facing the audience. During the winter of 1836-37 the school, not large, was divided between the two small rooms upon the lower floor extending across each end of the building. Mr. Brown had charge of the more advanced girls in the north room. As he was necessarily much absent, on account of Seminary duties, we were often left to ourselves, excepting at recitation. Notwithstanding the temptation to lawlessness which such an arrangement might seem to involve, we were never more studious nor faithful. Miss Mary Stone had charge of the younger girls in the south room, and there was never a sweeter, more patient soul than hers, nor a teacher more beloved. Among my most sacred memories of Abbot are the social prayer meetings held with Miss Stone once a week. I especially remember the hallowed influence of that sweet hymn, “I Love to Steal Awhile Away”, sung in the hush of the hall with the soft light of the descending sun looking in at the western windows. Those were happy days!