

**EARLIEST RECORDING OF “SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT” DISCOVERED ON WAX CYLINDER BY
GRAMMY-WINNING ARCHEOPHONE RECORDS**

*Made in 1894 by African-American Singing Group the Standard Quartette, It Will Be Featured on
“Waxing the Gospel” Compilation, Coming Sep. 30th*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHAMPAIGN, IL (THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2016) — Check twice before you have your trash hauled away. That’s the lesson from Archeophone Records (www.archeophone.com), which today announced the discovery of the oldest known recording of the seminal African-American spiritual, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” Found on a badly preserved wax cylinder made in 1894, the record was barely decipherable and sold as scrap from one collector to another. But Archeophone co-principal Richard Martin identified the sounds, and now after careful restoration, the track will be one of 102 selections on the book and CD compilation, *Waxing the Gospel: Mass Evangelism and the Phonograph, 1890-1900*, which will be released on September 30, 2016 via all major physical and online retailers, as well as the label’s website.

Waxed by the African-American singing group the Standard Quartette on a spring 1894 trip to the Columbia Records studio in Washington DC, this “holy grail” of early recording history pushes back by fifteen years the first known recording of the classic spiritual. A 1909 disc by the Fisk University Jubilee Quartet for the Victor Talking Machine Company had previously held the honor. It’s not that cylinders by the Standard Quartette were not known of—they are documented in period catalogs—but only two from 1894 have ever come to light. This is the second of the two. The first, “Keep Movin’,” is featured on Archeophone’s Grammy-winning CD, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1891-1922*.

Luck played the biggest role in the discovery. Collector David Giovannoni bought a large group of damaged early cylinders—moldy, noisy, and thought to have no retrievable content—to shave down and use for new recordings. The package that was sent to him arrived with most of its contents shattered. Only a few of the records survived, and one in particular looked to David like it might still have sound left on it. He carefully transferred the cylinder according to the highest archival standards, and underneath an ocean of noise was discovered the announcement at the beginning of the record: “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,*” as sung by the famous *Standard Quartette*. The surprises did not stop there.

“This version of ‘Swing Low’ is very different from what people expect,” said Archeophone co-principal Meagan Hennessey. “The chorus is familiar, but the verses are different. The Standard Quartette sing lyrics we associate with other jubilee songs, meaning that at least in the hands of this singing group, lines of the same meter from the wider repertoire were seen as interchangeable.”

The restoration process itself unveiled stunning revelations about the 1890s performance style of the Standard Quartette. Martin said, “Some parts of the singing come on very strong, but there are passages that are sung very softly, and they were hidden beneath noise. I actually had to search for signal and ‘blow it up’ rather than take down the noise floor in many passages, which would have obliterated the

good parts. There are complex things going on here with harmony and rhythm, but you've got to listen closely through the noise."

For many years, Archeophone's motto to collectors has been "Save, Don't Shave." The story of "Swing Low" puts a fine point on the saying, and it joins the unique tales of 101 other endangered audio tracks on *Waxing the Gospel*. You can hear samples of the before-and-after work on "Swing Low" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAEO3S9s7CE>, and you can learn more about the album at <http://archeophone.com/catalogue/waxing-the-gospel/>.

About Archeophone Records

Based in Champaign, Illinois, Archeophone Records produces critical editions of the world's oldest recordings: audio tracked prior to 1925, during the acoustic (i.e., pre-microphone) era of recording. Archeophone has received twelve Grammy nominations for its reissues, with its 2005 release *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1891-1922* winning the Best Historical Album Award at the 49th Grammys. Additionally, the label has provided consultation and audio restorations for TV shows such as *Boardwalk Empire*. *Waxing the Gospel* is the 68th reissue produced by Archeophone. It is distributed by Alternative Distribution Alliance (ADA) and available in both CD and digital formats.

For more information, please contact:

Meagan Hennessey or Richard Martin at Archeophone: press@archeophone.com, (217) 355-9883.

