This presentation focuses on how women of both indigenous and European descent observed and participated in the public festivals in the colonial silver mining boomtown of Potosí, in the Spanish viceroyalty of Peru. On one hand, I will argue that female spectatorship of festivals was not simply passive but entailed its own form of agency—and for this reason was often viewed with suspicion by authorities, who attempted to regulate the dress and activities of women during public celebrations. On the other hand, I will show how festivals afforded opportunities for indigenous and mestizo women to assert a distinctive social status, both through confraternity processions and the sponsorship of ephemeral architecture. Among the textual and visual sources that I use to examine the role of women and the political instrumentality of festivals is Bartolomé Arzáns de Orsúa y Vela’s Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí, one of whose very rare manuscripts is held at the John Hay Library at Brown University.